



## PUTTING IT PLAINLY

*By the same author*

THE LIBRARY IN EDUCATION

# PUTTING IT PLAINLY

*For Those who have to State Facts in Writing*

by

R. G. RALPH, M.A., Ph.D.

*Tutor in English, Royal Air Force College, Cranwell*

*With Questions and Answers*



METHUEN & CO., LTD. LONDON  
*36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2*

*First published in 1952*

*Durga Sah Municipal Library,  
NAINITAL.*

दुर्गासाह म्युनिसिपल लाईब्रेरी  
नैनीताल

*Class No. .... 807 .....*

*Book No. .... R 215 P .....*

*Received on .... July 1967 .....*

CATALOGUE NUMBERS

4586/U

7398/U (SCHOOL)

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## FOREWORD

Most of the troubles we have when we try to express ourselves in writing are caused by laziness. It is easy to pick up such expressions as "With reference to your letter, we note the position that has arisen with regard to . . .," and before long we can write pages like this without thinking. We may suspect that this kind of writing is stale, but we comfort ourselves with, "Everyone knows what I mean."

Then one day we find that no one knows what we mean, and—worse still—that people think we are being pompous.

We may turn to a grammar book, and at first all is well. We nod approvingly as the author describes offences against good sense and good taste. Then, at his next remark, we frown. "What rot," we think. "Everyone writes that. Everyone understands it." The author has, of course, described a mistake that we ourselves habitually commit.

This is not a grammar book, though grammatical errors are described, and some grammar is introduced to show why these are errors. The book is to help you to express facts in writing. Hints and suggestions (not rules) are given, and you need not lose confidence if you find that these are often disregarded by great writers. You and I are not great writers. We do not gallop magnificently across country, but rather trudge along the footpath, seeking to walk round rather than to leap over the snares and pitfalls—if we see them in time. Snares and pitfalls are collected in the following chapters, and you are shown how to recognise them and walk cautiously around them.

This book deals with factual prose because that is what most ordinary folk have to write. But the virtues of factual prose are the virtues of all writing. Having learned what these virtues are, the reader will see how they shine in our greatest literature, which is imaginative writing. Having learned to express facts, some readers may themselves aspire to imaginative writing; the others, by being better able to appreciate the superb craftsmanship of the great writer, will find new enjoyment in novels, plays, poetry and essays.

R. G. R.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	V
CHAPTER I	
GIVE ME THAT IN WRITING: OR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPEECH AND PROSE	I
Speech as a means of communication. What prose is. The essentials of prose. Emotional prose and factual prose. The qualities of factual prose.	
CHAPTER II	
BY WHAT SWEET NAME? OR NOTES ON NOUNS	9
The parts of speech. Nouns and noun equivalents. Collective nouns. Apostrophe "s" and "s" apostrophe. A warning against abstract nouns.	
CHAPTER III	
PRONOMINAL PROBLEMS	14
What pronouns do. The need for care when using pronouns. Subjects and verbs. Difficulties with "I" and "me," "he" and "him," "she" and "her," "we" and "us," "they" and "them," "who" and "whom."	
CHAPTER IV	
ECONOMY SHOULD BE OUR WATCHWORD: OR ADVENTURES WITH ADJECTIVES	21
What an adjective is: adjective equivalents. The "his and her" difficulty. The need for economy with adjectives. Double negatives. Hackneyed adjectives. The proper use of "appreciable."	
CHAPTER V	
REGULATING THE RELATIVES	27
What relative pronouns do. Choosing between "that" and "which." "That" referring to a person. "And which" and "but which." The awkward use of relatives—some common errors.	

## CONTENTS

vii

### CHAPTER VI

PAGE

#### INFINITE (BUT NOT BOUNDLESS) DIFFICULTIES

35

The split infinitive. Gerunds and participles. The fused participle. The unattached participle, and the badly placed participle. The correct use of "referring" and "due to."

### CHAPTER VII

#### INTO ACTION: OR VIVISECTING THE VERBS

43

Transitive verbs. The agreement of subject and verb—some common errors. Difficulties with the passive voice. The use of subjunctive forms. The value of finite verbs to factual prose.

### CHAPTER VIII

#### ADJUSTING THE ADVERBS, PLACING THE PREPOSITIONS, CONTROLLING THE CONJUNCTIONS

50

What an adverb is: Adverb equivalents. Confusion between adjectives and adverbs. The correct placing of adverbs. The use of "relatively" and "comparatively."

What a preposition is. Superfluous prepositions. The preposition at the end of a sentence.

What conjunctions are. Beginning a sentence with a conjunction. "Propped-up" conjunctions. The use of "while" as a conjunction.

### CHAPTER IX

#### LIGHT THE BLUE PAPER AND RETIRE: OR THE EFFECTS OF WORDS

60

The difference between the meaning of a word and the emotional effect of a word: the danger of confusion. How to handle words of high emotional power.

The abstract appendage. Abstract nouns and muddled thinking. Dangerous expressions. How to get rid of abstract nouns. Choosing one's own words.

### CHAPTER X

#### ANATOMY FOR AMATEURS: OR SENTENCE STRUCTURE

72

Phrases, clauses and sentences. The "completeness" of the sentence. Dangers with participles and with "for example."

The natural order of words. Complex sentences. Periodic and balanced constructions. "Afterthought" sentences, and the misuse of "also." Negative sentences and their disadvantages.

The repetition of words, "Former" and "latter." "He (X) told him (Y)." "Elegant variation." "Respective" and "respectively."



## CHAPTER XI

PAGE

## TELLING 'EM STRAIGHT: OR DIRECT SENTENCES

85

Precepts for the factual prose writer. The proper use of the passive voice. Impersonal constructions.

Variations on a theme: the characteristics of the direct sentence.

Padding. Kinds of padding. The causes of padding. The use of idiom.

Analysis of direct and indirect prose.

## CHAPTER XII

## SUITABLE STOPPING-PLACES: OR SOME NOTES ON PUNCTUATION

99

Some principles. The comma. The semi-colon. The colon. The question mark. The dash. The exclamation mark. Quotation marks. The hyphen.

## CHAPTER XIII

## ACCORDING TO PLAN: OR MARSHALLING THE MATERIAL

112

Thinking of the reader. Collection of material. Selection of material. Arrangement of material. Expression of material. Revision: points to look for. Paragraphing. How to write a précis.

## CHAPTER XIV

## FERRETING OUT FACTS

121

A library as a storehouse of facts. The use of the library catalogue. Sources of information: the public libraries; reference libraries; special libraries.

Books as sources of information. Reference books. Bibliographies. Choosing books. Extracting information from books. Note-taking.

## BOOKS

128

## ANSWERS

129

## INDEX

148

## CHAPTER I

# GIVE ME THAT IN WRITING OR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPEECH AND PROSE

To write prose we must know what prose is, and to understand prose we must distinguish between spoken English and written English. Many people cannot write prose because they do not realise that speech and prose are two different ways of communicating ideas; therefore they cannot see why they should not write as they talk, provided they talk well.

These people are confused because they think that the spoken language and the written language resemble each other more than they do. Actually, they differ widely. When we write we use words, and words only, to express our ideas; but when we speak we use several other ways of making ourselves understood.

In the first place, a speaker varies his speed of delivery, his pauses, and the volume and pitch of his voice. These things, all of which help him to make his meaning clear, cannot be written down; all we can do is to indicate pauses very roughly by punctuation. The writer has to manage without these aids to expression.

Then there is intonation; that is, the variation in pitch of the sounds made by the speaker. What is usually called "expression" in speech is produced almost entirely by intonation, yet there is no way of showing intonation on the normal written page. One can study a complete grammar of a foreign language without suspecting that the intonation of the language differs from the English intonation; but no matter how well a person masters the grammar and pronunciation of a language, a native will not readily understand a simple sentence spoken with the English intonation.

A speaker also uses accent, which again we have no way of showing in ordinary writing. *Présent* and *présent*, *rébel* and

rebél, récord and recórd, ínvalid and inválid—these and many others are identical in writing, but different when spoken.

Pace, volume, intonation and accent are aids to communication which only spoken English can use. Moreover, ideas are often expressed by a person's whole behaviour, of which speech is only a part. When two people are working together, they may communicate by gestures, movements, and the objects they are handling, as much as by speaking. Their utterances may be grunts and mutterings, and still have meaning.

Speech can often be broken and disjointed, and still be a successful means of communication. Suppose a person who had just read a message looked up and uttered two words, "Good job." Any one of the following thoughts might be in his mind:

"I have been made managing director of the firm."

"The boss has fallen down the lift shaft."

"I wonder whether that job has any prospects?"

"I wish I could get one of those new 20 h.p. cars."

"He expects me to work twelve hours a day for £4 a week."

We would not be able to guess his thoughts exactly, but we would be able to tell, from his intonation and accent, whether he was feeling pleased, vindictive, doubtful, or covetous, or whether he was being sarcastic. His utterance would probably tell us what sort of a message he had just read. But suppose, instead of speaking, that person had written the words, "Good job." They would be meaningless.

Disjointed words are of course used mainly in conversation and in moments of excitement, but even the man delivering a formal speech has advantages over the writer. He can prepare listeners for an important statement by speaking more slowly or more quickly, by raising or lowering his voice, or by increasing the accent on certain words. He can observe the effect of his words and make adjustments to suit his listeners' reactions. He can help them over a dull or difficult passage by assuming a livelier manner; to do so he will use pace, volume, intonation, accent, and perhaps movement and gesture.

PROSE is not speech written down. Even the recording of a passage of well-composed, continuous speech does not normally give us prose. Prose relies solely on words to communicate

ideas, and these have to be arranged so as to make up for those parts of the spoken language that cannot be written down.

A writer has more time to collect and arrange his thoughts, and to choose his words, than a speaker has; he has more words to choose from, for everyone has a larger "writing vocabulary" than "speaking vocabulary." Most people know what "nonchalant" means, but how many are sure enough of its pronunciation to use it themselves?

The writer can choose and arrange his words more carefully than the speaker, and he should always try to compress his meaning into as few words as possible. When people are talking about things they can see or touch they may use fewer words than they would if they were writing about them, but otherwise speech is always more wordy than prose. There are two reasons for this, the first of which concerns the speaker. He utters his words as his ideas come to him; he has afterthoughts, and he pauses to explain the connections between his ideas; he often inserts words merely to give himself time to think. A person might say:

Go along the main road until you come to a lane on the left-hand side. Just before you get to it you will see a cottage on the opposite side of the road, with a thatched roof and stone walls. Just past that—about a hundred yards—there is a signpost. You will hardly be able to read it because the lettering is nearly all worn off.

If he had to write these directions, he would sort out and arrange his ideas. The result would be more concise, perhaps like this:

Go along the main road until you come to a lane on your left, opposite a thatched, stone cottage. About a hundred yards past this is a signpost with almost illegible lettering.

The second reason why prose is briefer than speech concerns the reader. The listener has to absorb the meaning of words at the rate at which the speaker utters them, and if he misses anything it is gone for good. He does not therefore like speech to be too highly charged with meaning. Reading, however, is more difficult than listening, so the reader does not want to waste time and effort reading unnecessary words. He likes meaning to be expressed in a few words.

The writer must therefore compress his meaning. He must

also arrange his words to produce the emphasis that a speaker would get by accent and intonation. Someone might say:

Many people study this subject, but few people understand it.

He has said two equal sentences, linked by "but." He can make his meaning precise by accentuating "understand." A writer trying to express the same thought cannot do this, unless he underlines "understand"—and he cannot underline a word in every other sentence. But what he can do is to write:

Although many people study this subject, few understand it. He has made one sentence, in which everything hangs upon the word "understand." It is the most important word in the sentence. He has gained the effect that the speaker obtained by accent.

A writer must also show more carefully than a speaker how his ideas are related; that is, he must, as far as he can, indicate whether one idea is a result of another, a cause of it, an inference from it, an alternative to it, and so on. No one would criticise a person who said:

We missed the last bus and had to hire a car. We were too tired to walk home.

A reader, however, would grasp these facts more easily if relationships were indicated:

As we had missed the last bus and were too tired to walk home, we had to hire a car.

We had missed the last bus and were too tired to walk home, so we had to hire a car.

We had missed the last bus, so we had to hire a car, for we were too tired to walk home.

We had to hire a car, because we had missed the last bus and were too tired to walk home.

From reading other people's work we pick up, and use in our own writing, various ways of fitting words together so as to compress our meaning, to give emphasis, and to show the relationships between our ideas. These arrangements become so familiar that we forget they are conventional. Yet we have only to look at the work of young children who are trying to express themselves in writing to realise that these arrangements of words do not come naturally.

To write prose one must learn a technique. But the question arises: is there one technique, or does it vary according to the ideas the writer has to express?

Briefly, there are two kinds of prose, emotional prose and factual prose, each of which shades off into the other. Emotional prose tries to express the writer's emotion, to evoke emotion in the reader, and to stir the reader's imagination. The facts in such prose are often unimportant, for a reader's emotions can be stirred even when he does not properly understand the factual statements he is reading.

Much of our most admired prose comes from imaginative literature. The following is by Milton:

"I shall detain you no longer in the demonstration of what we should not do, but strait conduct ye to a hillside, where I will point ye out the right path of a virtuous and noble education; laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect, and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming."<sup>1</sup>

This is successful because it affects the reader as Milton wished him to be affected; but it affects him in the same way as poetry and oratory do, and by the same means—by its musical rhythm, its imagery, and its use of words that strike the imagination. But it is not a model of factual prose. It has some qualities that are not essential to factual prose, but it lacks some qualities that are essential. It does not state the facts simply or concisely.

Nowadays many imaginative writers write as the factual writer should write. Somerset Maugham explains what should be the aims of the factual writer, and at the same time provides him with a model passage:

"For long after I became a writer by profession I spent much time on learning how to write and subjected myself to a very tiresome training in the endeavour to improve my style. But these efforts I abandoned when my plays began to be produced and when I started to write again it was with a different aim. I no longer sought a jewelled prose and a rich texture, on unavailing attempts to achieve which I had formerly wasted much labour; I sought on the contrary plainness and simplicity. With so much that I wanted to say within reasonable limits I felt that I could not afford to waste words and I set out now

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise of Education.*

with the notion of using only such as were necessary to make my meaning clear. I had no space for ornament. My experience in the theatre had taught me the value of succinctness."<sup>1</sup>

Factual prose must be *accurate, clear, and brief*. Prose is accurate when the reader receives exactly the same idea as that in the writer's mind. The man who wrote,

Kaiser Wilhelm was then a young prince, deformed and hated by his parents,  
meant:

Kaiser Wilhelm was then a deformed young prince, hated by his parents.

True, we know what he meant. But we have guessed, and to ask a reader to guess is dangerous.

*BE ACCURATE: NEVER ASK THE READER  
TO GUESS*

Prose is clear when the reader can follow the thought without pausing, and without being aware of the words in which it is expressed. When we read,

Had he not previously demonstrated that his regard for the truth was by no means over-conscientious, we could not but have believed his story,  
we have to pause—though perhaps only for a second—to work out what it means. We need not have paused if the author had written:

We would have believed his story if he had not previously shown that he was a liar.

*BE CLEAR: NEVER PUZZLE THE READER*

Prose is brief when the meaning is expressed in the fewest possible words, and there is no repetition of ideas. Too many words bore and befog the reader. It is a waste of time to write, or to read, such sentences as the following:

Rank carelessness on the part of the driver was the sole cause of the accident; if he had been properly alert and doing his job conscientiously the unfortunate occurrence could quite easily have been averted.

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Of Human Bondage*.

This means no more than:

The driver's carelessness caused the accident.

*BE BRIEF: NEVER WRITE AN UNNECESSARY WORD*

A reader is a proud, lazy and critical person. A writer must be humble, painstaking, and very, very considerate of his reader.

"Easy writing's curst hard reading."<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \*

#### PAINLESS EXTRACTIONS

From the list below extract words to replace the expressions that follow.

authentic	extempore	imperturbable
infallible	parsimonious	perfunctory
flippant	implicit	primeval      versatile

1. Belonging to the dawn of history.
2. Devised on the spur of the moment.
3. Not easily excited or upset.
4. Of undisputed origin.
5. Readily applying oneself to new subjects.
6. Excessively careful in spending money.
7. Done merely for the sake of getting through a duty.
8. Implied but not plainly expressed.
9. Incapable of making mistakes.
10. Apt to treat serious matters lightly.

#### HORRIBLE OUTRAGES

Which quality of factual prose does each of the following sentences most lack? Where possible rewrite the sentences.

1. I am not writing to him because I am angry with him.
2. Whenever we take up our pens in the endeavour to put down our thoughts on paper we should feel it incumbent upon us to express ourselves in the minimum of words and without needless dilation upon irrelevant details.

<sup>1</sup> Sheridan.



3. The villagers were literally petrified with fear.
4. For most of his life he ruled absolutely savage people.
5. He had only to refer to his personal records that he kept for his own private use.
6. The sincerity of his style arises from his adherence to the principle of truth, truth to nature and truth to his own high calling.
7. The missing man was last seen by a coastguard fishing from the rocks.
8. The king was as anxious to conciliate the bishops as his ministers.
9. To the general account given by Mr. Brown, the leader of the expedition, Mr. Smith has added a chapter dealing with the geological discoveries.
10. In the case of employees whose entitlement in respect of annual leave is two weeks, this may, subject to approval by the Head of the Department concerned, be taken at any time during the year, the year being reckoned from January 1st to December 31st, but any leave still outstanding on December 31st must be considered forfeit.

## DEATHLESS DITTY

Is the following accurately expressed?

"And never, never she'll forget  
The happy, happy day,  
When in the church, before God's priest,  
She gave herself away."

## EASY MONEY

Challenge someone to get all the following right. What colour is a man's complexion when it is described as:

- (a) pallid. (b) sallow. (c) sanguine. (d) florid. (e) livid.  
(f) jaundiced. (g) hectic?

## CHAPTER II

### BY WHAT SWEET NAME?

#### OR NOTES ON NOUNS

A good way to avoid grammatical errors and awkward sentences is to learn to recognise the difficulties that occur with each of the parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. But one must remember that words have no trade unions. A word is not forced to act as one part of speech only. "Book," for example, does a different job in each of the following sentences:

This is a new book.

This requires a book entry.

Book seats for to-night's performance.

In the first sentence it is a noun, in the second an adjective, and in the third a verb.

NOUN describes the naming of anything that can be thought about—any creature, object, or idea. There are words that are almost invariably used as nouns, but there are others, such as "book," that are frequently used as other parts of speech. Whether a word is a noun or not is decided, not by the word itself, but by the work it does in a particular sentence. A dictionary describes a word as the part of speech that it most commonly is. It would describe "book" as a noun and as a verb, but probably not as an adjective. It would tell us that "young" and "active" were adjectives; yet in the sentence,

The young and active managed to escape,  
their job is to name and they are nouns.

In the next three examples, "rising," "travel" and "arrival" are all nouns, because they name ideas:

I dislike early rising.

Fast travel will be impossible.

His arrival astonished me.

If other words are substituted for "rising," "travel" and "arrival" without altering the shape of the sentence, the substi-

tutes must do the same jobs as the originals; that is, they must also be nouns. If one hesitates to apply "noun" to a group of words, one may call these groups "noun equivalents":

*I dislike getting up early.*

*To travel fast will be impossible.*

*That he should have arrived astonished me.*

Nouns do not cause many difficulties. Writers are sometimes doubtful, however, whether such words as "team," "herd," "collection" and "crowd," which refer to groups of creatures or things, ought to be singular or plural. Usually they are treated as singular, and one should follow this practice as long as it does not outrage common sense. There is no rule, and each sentence must be judged separately. One should write,

The jury brought in its verdict at twelve o'clock, because we do not think of the members of the jury as individuals as far as their verdict is concerned. On the other hand—though "jurymen" or "members of the jury" would be better—it would be permissible to write:

The jury are now having their lunch.

We should feel that there was something wrong with,

The jury is now having its lunch, since here we are thinking of the jury as separate men and women. What we must avoid with these nouns is jumping from singular to plural, or from plural to singular, and producing such sentences as:

The crew was now on board, and awaiting their orders.

The addition of 's or s' to nouns presents a few problems. We add 's to a singular noun—the dog's nose was cold—and s' to a plural noun—dogs' noses should be cold. When we have a plural noun, such as "men," "children" or "sheep," that does not end in -s, we add 's and not s'; we write "men's clothes," "children's toys" and "sheep's tails."

Singular nouns that end in an "s" sound, whether written -s' or -nce are more worrying. Are we to write:

Burns' cottage                      or Burns's cottage?

Keats' poems                        or Keats's poems?

the oasis' shade                    or the oasis's shade?

for his conscience' sake        or for his conscience's sake?

Formerly it was the practice to add only the apostrophe to such words as these, but nowadays it is becoming more common to pronounce the extra "s" sound, and in writing to add 's where the sound is pronounced; "Keats's poems" is now more common than "Keats' poems." Where, as in "oasis's," the extra "s" is difficult to say, only the apostrophe should be written ("oasis' shade"), or the difficulty should be dodged by writing "of" ("the shade of the oasis").

To make a noun equivalent possessive, it is proper to add 's to only one word, which need not be that which logically indicates the possessor. There is nothing wrong with "William the Conqueror's army," "William and Mary's reign," "the Lord Mayor of London's banquet," or "the lord of the manor's sons." The device must, however, be used sensibly: "the writer of the book's criticism" may mean either "the criticism made by the author of the book" or "the man who wrote the criticism of the book."

Then there are expressions such as "a friend of my daughter's" and "a suggestion of mine," which some people say are wrong because possession is indicated twice, by "of" and by the possessive form of the following word. These are not incorrect, for the "double possessive" gives either a different emphasis or a different meaning.

Your cat killed one of my chickens,  
is not the same as:

That cat of yours killed one of my chickens.  
The emphasis is different. The second sentence shows greater feeling, and almost accuses the cat of previous offences. An illustration of a different meaning is:

A picture of the Lord Mayor,  
compared with,  
A picture of the Lord Mayor's.

### *ENTER THE SERPENTS*

What are the vilest words in English?

Abstract nouns.

What are abstract nouns?

Absence, conscience, possibility, credulity, principle, idea, nature, furtiveness, population, nationality, belief, truth, character—nouns that label things we cannot see, touch, hear, smell or taste.

Why are these vile?

Because, like serpents, they creep in where they are not wanted.

When are they not wanted?

When a man is writing about an abstraction, such as his conscience, he must give it a name, and that name must be an abstract noun. When he is writing about something concrete, such as a motor car, he should not need many abstract nouns.

Surely everyone knows that?

But observe. One man writes, "The motor car is well constructed, and if it is kept clean and frequently oiled, it will last for years"—and there is nothing wrong with that. Another man, fascinated by the serpents, writes: "The motor car is of sound construction, and if attention is paid to its cleanliness, and lubrication is frequently carried out, it has great durability."

What are the abstract nouns there?

Construction, attention, cleanliness, lubrication and durability—all unnecessary.

Why unnecessary?

They make the sentence vague, pompous, and wordy. It lacks . . .

Accuracy, clarity and brevity—all abstract nouns, are they not?

It would be better to say, "The sentence is not accurate, clear, or brief."

#### REMOVE THE REPTILES

Rewrite the following sentences, using as few abstract nouns as possible.

1. Upon his arrival he found his colleagues in a state of great excitement.
2. He expressed the view that the cost of the process placed it beyond our financial resources.

3. The writer should spare no effort to bring his sentences to perfection as regards clarity and precision.
4. In the near future we hope to make an announcement with regard to the exact time of his arrival.
5. There is every probability that a collected edition of his poems will make its appearance later in the year.

## A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

Choose between "its" and "their."

1. The Sunday School outing lost its/their way.
2. The Sunday School outing lost its/their railway tickets.

## GATECRASHERS

Which word in each of the following groups is an intruder?

1. Forbid, prescribe, prohibit, interdict.
2. Comprehensible, intelligible, legible, understandable.
3. Imply, infer, insinuate, refer.
4. Iniquitous, nefarious, nocturnal, wicked.
5. Caustic, morbid, mordant, pungent.

## CONVERSATION AT THE ZOO

"Is that the elephant's tail?"

"No, dear, its its nose."

Punctuate the second remark properly.

## TRY YOUR SKILL

Pick out the subjects of the following sentences.

1. The speaker was the man in the bowler hat.
2. The head of the family conducted prayers.
3. Will anybody now be able to save the situation?
4. Desperate was the struggle for mastery.
5. Whoever came in last and forgot to shut the gate is to blame.
6. That he was lying was obvious to us all.
7. How useless these precautions turned out to be.
8. Crossing the road in the rush hour can be dangerous.
9. To find one's way in a strange town is difficult.
10. Leave well alone.

Several problems occur because the pronouns "I," "he," "she," "we," "they" and "who" only keep these forms while they are the subjects of sentences; otherwise they change to "me," "him," "her," "us," "them," and "whom." This is simple enough, and we habitually get them right. We do not say "Me talk" for "I talk," or "Him talked to I" for "He talked to me." The verb "to be," however, often causes trouble. This verb really only indicates time, and when it links two words together in sense those two words refer to the same thing. In each of the following examples the words in *italics* refer to different aspects of the same person or thing:

*I am a householder.*

*He was not a great statesman.*

*Germany has been an aggressive nation.*

*The gardens will be a mass of blooms.*

"I" is the subject of the first sentence. It refers perhaps to Mr. John Brown, who is speaking. But "householder" also refers to Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown is therefore the subject of the sentence whether you call him "I" or "householder." The sentence could be reversed:

A householder am I.

This is true of all the examples, though they will not all reverse so neatly.

This grammatical fact is of no interest to Mr. Brown until he finds himself saying,

It is me who owns the house,  
and wonders whether or not that is correct. It is not correct.  
He should have said:

It is I who own the house, *or*,  
I it is who own the house, *or, preferably*,  
I own the house.

Nowadays not many people say "It is I," or "I am he"; they say "It's me," and "I'm him." They say "Are those them?" or "Is that them?" rather than "Are those they?" This is accepted in speech, but not in prose. The writer, therefore, has to avoid both the ungrammatical sentence and also the stiffness of such expressions as "Are those they?" He might say:

"It was me that did it."

He should not write this except in dialogue or very informal writing. On the other hand,

It was I that did it,  
might strike him as affected. He should therefore remove one pronoun, and write:

I did it, *or*,  
I was the person who did it, *or*,  
I was the culprit, *or*,  
I was responsible.

The same tendency to use "me" forms where "I" forms are required appears when parts of the verb "to be" are understood, as in the following sentences, which are wrong:

They are as rich as us.

He is not as clever as me.

The correct forms, "we" and "I," seem unnatural to some people, so it is best when writing to repeat the verb, thus:

They are as rich as we are.

He is not as clever as I am.

Repeating the verb makes the sentence foolproof, and it is often important that such sentences should be foolproof. For example,

She knows him better than me,  
means that she knows him better than she knows me;

She knows him better than I,  
means that she knows him better than I know him.



- |                    |   |   |   |                                       |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 7. Plenipotentiary |   |   |   | could be used about an Eastern ruler? |
|                    |   |   |   | a geographical survey?                |
| 8. Plenary         | „ | „ | „ | an ambassador?                        |
|                    |   |   |   | an assembly?                          |
|                    |   |   |   | a harvest?                            |
| 9. Coloratura      | „ | „ | „ | a dockyard?                           |
|                    |   |   |   | a person of mixed parentage?          |
|                    |   |   |   | a singer?                             |
|                    |   |   |   | a dyeing process?                     |
| 10. Chiaroscuro    | „ | „ | „ | a painting?                           |
|                    |   |   |   | magic?                                |
|                    |   |   |   | optical instruments?                  |

## REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

Correct the following sentences.

1. A native appeared whom we were told would act as our guide.
2. The army was now halted, and busily preparing their positions against attack.
3. From travel books a good deal can be learnt of social conditions in other countries, thus enabling the reader to compare them with his own.
4. They scorn to seek advice from we who are mere amateurs.
5. The business was started some years ago by my wife and I.

## MORE MONEY FOR OLD ROPE

Challenge someone to distinguish accurately between:

continual	and	continuous
judicial	and	judicious
reverend	and	reverent
skilful	and	skilled

## COMIC RELIEF

What is concise in one volume, but shorter in two?

## CHAPTER IV

# ECONOMY SHOULD BE OUR WATCHWORD OR ADVENTURES WITH ADJECTIVES

The words in italics are ADJECTIVES.

A *white* house stood at the crossroads.

The house was *distant* from the village.

*Yonder* house is to let.

*Each* house in the village has a garden.

*Several* houses have been pulled down.

The word "house," a noun in every sentence, refers to an actual thing, and the adjectives either describe or point out that thing. "White" and "distant" in the first two sentences tell us something about the actual house; "yonder," "each," and "several" in the remaining sentences point out one or some of all the houses in the world. In order to describe or point out, an adjective must have something to describe or point to; that something must be named; therefore an adjective cannot convey meaning without a noun or pronoun.

Another way of looking at this is to say that the adjective restricts the application of the noun or pronoun, for "white house" can obviously apply to fewer objects than "house" can.

Groups of words can form adjective equivalents, such as we have in "goods *made in Britain*" and "the country *round about us*"; we could replace these by ordinary adjectives—"British-made goods" and "the *surrounding* country." These adjective equivalents are often lengthy, for example:

These goods, *which are produced in England by skilled craftsmen from entirely British materials*, are the best you can buy.

Words that are more usually nouns are often used as adjectives, as when we talk about "a book entry," "the cricket season," and "women voters." This even happens when we have a word with the same meaning that is generally an adjective; we speak of "an autumn day" rather than "an autumnal day,"

of "a spring day" rather than "a vernal day" and of "a woman driver" rather than "a female driver." All nouns, too, become adjectives when they are made possessive, as in "a woman's hat," "soldiers' wives," and "the man next door's business."

Some words are commonly used either as pronouns or adjectives, the chief being "that," "this," "these," "those," "what" and "which." In the sentence,

That story is dull,

"that" is an adjective, indicating which story. In the sentence,

I told you that,

"that" is a pronoun, standing for some such noun as "story," "joke" or "fact."

The pronouns "I," "he," "she," "it," "we," "you" and "they" become "my," "his," "her," "its," "our," "your" and "their" when used as adjectives and placed in front of the nouns they qualify; when used as adjectives and separated from their nouns they become "mine," "his," "hers," "ours," "yours" and "theirs."

Here is a difficulty we often meet. We might have to address to a mixed audience some such remark as:

Has anyone not brought his ticket?

We might feel that we should say:

Has anyone not brought his or her ticket?

Unless the sentence is short, we get into trouble with "his or her."

One way of escape is to use a plural adjective, thus:

Has anyone not brought their ticket?

Although this is common in speech, and in prose has the support of some eminent writers, many people dislike it. Some say it shows carelessness, others that it has a Victorian flavour. The difficulty can often be avoided by making the whole sentence plural, that is:

Have you all brought your tickets?

If this is not possible—though it nearly always is—one can always simplify the sentence. Here is a brute of a sentence:

has an unlicensed revolver in his or her  
he must surrender it to the police.

better expressed as:

has an unlicensed revolver must surrender

The cause of all the trouble in that sentence was the abstract noun—"possession."

Adjectives should be used sparingly. It is always worth while to go over one's work and remove some of the adjectives, though this will be done regretfully at first. There are nearly always some adjectives that can be deleted without altering one's meaning. Often two or three adjectives can be reduced to one more appropriate adjective—"a toilsome, difficult and exhausting journey" can become "an arduous journey." Sometimes adjectives can be removed if one changes a noun or a verb to a more exact one: "a small piece of rock" can be changed to "a fragment of rock," and "he made a close and detailed examination of the figures" can be changed to "he scrutinised the figures." These tricks not only make the prose briefer and more direct, but they make it more accurate. A person who examines anything, for example, may use any or all of his senses; but if we say he "scrutinises" it we mean that he uses his eyes only to examine it.

Economy should be our watchword. The person who has the will-power to say to himself, "*I will now remove half the adjectives in the passage I have written,*" is on the way to becoming a writer of good factual prose.

There is one thing that the prose writer should loathe as heartily as he loathes the unwanted abstract noun, and that is the hackneyed adjective. Some of these appear as "double negatives" such as *not infrequent*, *not unusual*, *not unlikely*, *not inconsiderable*, *not unobserved*, and *not unrewarded*. The factual prose writer should avoid "double negatives" altogether, if he can. A skilled writer may use a double negative, but not a hackneyed one, to obtain an effect that he could not obtain with a positive, but these fine distinctions are not for the amateur. When an amateur uses a double negative he nearly always does so either because he is afraid to say boldly and positively what he means, or because he is a parrot.

The real parrot cries, however, are pairs of words. An adjective has become irremovably fixed to some other word, and the pair has then been used and used until all its force, and often all its meaning too, has been worn away. We are all tired of *actual facts*, *active steps*, *active parts*, *definite advantages*,

*instinctive feelings, concrete examples, pressing needs, desperate needs, distinct assets, due considerations, obvious conclusions, simple reasons, real dangers, distinct possibilities, sheer necessities, gross errors, the near future, obvious omissions and urgent necessities; we are no longer impressed by things that are eminently suitable, highly misleading or even grossly exaggerated.*

These parrot cries are either absurd or pointless. A fact that is not actual is not a fact; a danger that is not real need not be feared; a person who is not taking an active part is taking no part at all; it is difficult to take steps without being active. "Fact," "danger," "part" and "steps" are therefore better left to stand alone, which they can quite well do.

How does an "instinctive feeling" differ from a "feeling"? How often are conclusions "obvious," reasons "simple," errors "gross," and possibilities "distinct"? And surely omissions are seldom "obvious" or they would not have been made.

A person who has a favourite parrot cry will sometimes persuade himself that it expresses a particular meaning that cannot otherwise be expressed. Such a person should carry out a small experiment. Supposing his parrot cry is "near future," let him write on five slips of paper, "I am going to Paris in the near future." On five more slips let him write, "I am going to Paris in the future," and on five more, "I am going to Paris soon." Let him then distribute the slips to fifteen people, and ask each to guess when he is leaving. If the three sentences are different in *meaning*, the guesses should fall into three fairly well-defined groups. They will not.

"Appreciable" is a hackneyed adjective which is often foolishly used. We meet sentences like this:

If two men are absent from work, it does not make an appreciable difference to the factory's output.  
If there is a difference, it must be appreciable to someone. The writer was trying to find an imposing way of saying "very little difference" or "hardly any difference." He was perhaps misled by his memories of sentences, such as the following, in which the person who did the appreciating was not mentioned:

If you write "very indignant" for "highly indignant" is there any appreciable difference?

This is correct, for the meaning is, "Will the reader be able to

appreciate any difference?" From such sentences as this it may be deduced, wrongly, that "appreciable" can mean "fairly large."

"Appreciable" should only be used when it is made clear that somebody appreciates something. Above all, it should not be overworked.

#### DUAL ROLES

Without changing them, use the following words (a) as adjectives, (b) as nouns.

French ringing subject watch white

#### ODD COUPLES

With what nouns do you associate the following adjectives? (e.g. *urban—town*)

oral regal mural filial aural lacteal labial  
lateral arboreal sidereal

#### REMEMBER YOUR WATCHWORD

Remove from the following all parrot cries and all unnecessary adjectives and abstract nouns. Note the improvement.

1. It would be a definite advantage if a committee of expert planners were to meet at relatively frequent intervals to discuss these problems thoroughly.
2. The sea lay calm and tranquil, like a polished mirror, in which the ship was reflected in perfect, intricate detail.
3. We do not envisage any real amelioration of conditions for some considerable time.
4. After due consideration, I was forced to the conclusion that evidence of enthusiasm among the committee members was sadly lacking.
5. In the near future there will be a desperate need for a greater number of skilled technicians working on the land, for the simple reason that agriculture is daily becoming a more highly mechanised industry.
6. It was in those days a tiny, isolated village of about twenty humble and unpretentious dwellings, occupied by hardy and

simple fishermen and sturdy farm labourers. There was no railway nearer than the county town, and the road from there was a rough, narrow country lane, badly metalled and unfenced in many places—little better, in fact, than a cart track.

#### ARE YOU A SOCIAL SUCCESS?

Choose the appropriate reply to each of the following remarks.

1. She made a petulant reply.
  - (a) Her mother is charming, too.
  - (b) She's a spoilt girl, isn't she?
  - (c) I wonder where she picks up her language.
2. He will have to rescind his decision.
  - (a) That will be humiliating for him.
  - (b) Most people have forgotten it.
  - (c) It certainly needs to be more clearly expressed.
3. He is a tyro.
  - (a) He ought to be shot.
  - (b) Was he born like that?
  - (c) No doubt he will improve.
4. The punishment was condign.
  - (a) No one will sympathise with him.
  - (b) It will encourage him to do the same thing again.
  - (c) It will make people sorry for him.
5. His methods were empiric.
  - (a) Dictators are not popular nowadays.
  - (b) I like a practical man.
  - (c) But he always kept inside the law, didn't he?

#### HOW TO KEEP THE PARTY CLEAN

"The manager has the right to refuse to admit anyone he thinks proper."

1. What does this sentence mean?
2. What did the writer intend it to mean?

## CHAPTER V

### REGULATING THE RELATIVES

Two sentences are often made into one by means of a RELATIVE PRONOUN. For example:

He travels fast + He travels alone = He travels fast *who* travels alone.

The house was built of yellow bricks + The house was ugly = The house, *which* was built of yellow bricks, was ugly.

I bought a book today + The book was a bargain = The book *that* I bought today was a bargain.

Relative pronouns are useful because they do two jobs at once, naming and joining, and thereby enable a person to compress his meaning, which is why we use more of them when we write than we do when we speak. They are sometimes a little difficult to handle, but the pitfalls, once recognised, are easily avoided.

The only difficult problem with relative pronouns is to decide between "that" and "which" in such sentences as the following:

We placed contracts with all the firms <sup>that</sup> ~~which~~ were able to undertake the work.

Only a few firms were able to undertake the work, <sup>that</sup> ~~which~~ required elaborate machinery.

In the first sentence, "that" is correct; in the second, "which" should be used.

"That" should introduce a group of words that goes with the word in front of "that" to form a noun equivalent. "Firms that were able to undertake the work" is the name of a particular kind of firm, and there is no pause between "firms" and "that." The sentence is:

We placed contracts with all the . . . firms-that-were-able-to-undertake-the-work.



If we write,

We placed contracts with all the firms, which were able to undertake the work,  
we have paused after "firms." We have marked this pause with a comma, and the meaning of the sentence is:

We placed contracts with all-the-firms, and all of them were able to undertake the work.

"Which" should introduce either another fact or a reason. It is therefore correct in:

Only a few firms were able to undertake the work, which required elaborate machinery.

"Only a few firms were able to undertake the work" is one fact; a pause follows, and then comes "which required elaborate machinery."

If we used "that," the sentence would become:

Only a few firms were able to undertake . . . the work-that-required-elaborate-machinery.

This means, "Only a few firms were able to undertake . . . a certain sort of work."

The distinction between "that" and "which" is obscured because we never put a word between "that" and the word it refers to. We can write,

He pointed to the train that he had just alighted from.  
But if we wish to move "from," we must change "that" to "which":

He pointed to the train from which he had just alighted.

This is perhaps why the distinction between "that" and "which" is not strictly observed, even by careful writers. Yet the difference is worth knowing, for we are certain sooner or later to come to a sentence in which the wrong relative may mislead the reader, for example:

The contract, that has been altered as you suggested, is being sent to you.

This suggests that there are several contracts, only one of which has been altered. If this is so, the commas are wrong; no internal punctuation is required. But if the commas mean that there is only one contract, the sentence would be clearer as:

The contract, which has been altered as you suggested, is being sent to you.

Furthermore, by knowing the distinction between "that" and "which" one avoids two common fallacies. The first is that "that" and "which" are interchangeable, and used for variety; if one has had two or three "thats" in succession, one should bring in a "which" or two to avoid monotony. The second fallacy is that "that" is used as a relative only in speech, and automatically becomes "which" in prose.

One often meets people who dislike using "that" as a relative when they write. In speech, "that" is often used to refer to a person. Anyone will say:

The person that did this must have been a fool.

This is quite correct. Some people, however, punctiliously change "that" to "who" when they write. It is certainly better, in speech and prose, to use "who" when, as in the following sentences, it refers to a particular person or group of persons:

The man who spoke to you just now has left.

The ladies who were present last week agreed.

But when no particular person is referred to, when some such word as "anybody," "everyone," "people," "man" or "person" is used, then "that" is correct, as in:

The man that betrays his comrades deserves to be shot.

Everyone that saw it was shocked.

The peasant that Wordsworth wrote about is difficult to find nowadays.

Sentences that contain "and who," "but who," "and which" and "but which" sometimes cause mistakes. These occur because people assume that a sentence with "and who," "but who," "and which" or "but which" must be correct if there is a preceding "who" or "which." This need not be so. The following is wrong:

It is a story in which innumerable fantastic and complicated events occur, and which are described in laborious detail.

The trouble is that the two "whiches" refer to different things, the first to "story," the second to "events." The best way to correct the sentence is to do without the second "which":

It is a story in which innumerable fantastic and complicated events occur, and these are described in laborious detail.

If we use relative pronouns carelessly we can easily write bad sentences. This type of sentence is very ungainly:

The building contains several large rooms, which, if the owner alters slightly, will make excellent offices.

The writer has tried to make one "which" do the work of two. It has to go into the expression "if the owner alters slightly," and it has to go into "will make excellent offices." It is legitimate to use one "which" with two or even more groups of words, but with this proviso: the "which" must either be the subject of all the groups, or not the subject of any of them. The last example is wrong because "which" is the subject of "will make excellent offices," but not the subject of "if the owner alters slightly." There are two ways of correcting the sentence. "Which" may be made the subject of both groups, thus:

The building contains several large rooms, which, if altered slightly by the owner, will make excellent offices.

But it is simpler to abandon the attempt to make "which" do for both groups, and write:

The building contains several large rooms, which, if the owner alters them slightly, will make excellent offices.

Another common mistake with relative pronouns is shown in the following sentence:

The troops encountered an enemy stronghold which they had either to destroy or retire.

Admittedly, a comma after "destroy" would help, but the sentence is structurally unsound, since, comma or not, "which" tries to act with "retire" as well as "destroy." The sentence could be written correctly as:

The troops had either to destroy the enemy stronghold they encountered, or to retire.

A much better form, however, would be:

The troops encountered an enemy stronghold. They had either to destroy it or retire.

The ambiguous sentence caused by a word or words put between a relative and the word it refers to is very common, and often quite difficult to avoid. Possessives are often troublesome, as the following sentences show:

He seized the horse's head, which was kicking savagely.

We conferred all night with the leaders of the tribesmen, who were ready to break into revolt at any moment.

The effects are seen in the upper forms of secondary schools, the purpose of which seems to be to cram children for examinations.

The first example can be improved by putting "which" next to the word it refers to:

He seized the head of the horse, which was kicking savagely.

It would be better, however, to remove "which" and write:

The horse was kicking savagely, but he seized its head, *or*,

Although the horse was kicking savagely, he seized its head.

The other two examples can only be corrected by removing the relatives. Assuming in the first that it is the tribesmen who are ready to revolt, and in the second that it is the upper forms only that cram children, the sentences would read:

The tribesmen were ready to break into revolt at any moment. We conferred all night with their leaders.

The effects are seen in the upper forms of secondary schools.

The purpose of these forms seems to be to cram children for examinations.

If relatives cannot conveniently be placed next to the words they refer to, they are better removed altogether.

The word "as," when used as a relative, often puzzles people. The following two sentences are correct:

I hope you do not lose your way, as I did.

He has now abandoned the scheme, as I told you he would.

The next two sentences are wrong:

To write a dull guide book, as could be produced by any hack writer, was unworthy of him.

They have no skill in building, as is possessed by the tribes to the North.

In the first sentence, "as" refers, not to a particular word, but to the general idea of losing one's way; in the second sentence it again refers to a general idea, that of abandoning a scheme, and not to a particular word. But in the third sentence, "as" refers to the word "book," and in the fourth it refers to the word "skill."

"As" cannot be used to refer to a particular word. It should only refer to a general notion which the reader extracts from a preceding group of words.

The third and fourth sentences can easily be corrected by changing "as" to "such as," which can refer to a single word. But they could also be correctly written as:

To write a dull guide book, as any hack writer could do, was unworthy of him.

They possess no skill in building, as the tribes to the North do.

By following "as" with the verb "do" we can always make it refer to a general idea and not a particular word.

\* \* \* \*

#### -IST LIST

A pessimist is the -ist who always expects the worst to happen. Who is the -ist who—

1. has a knowledge of languages?
2. has, illegally, more than one wife at once?
3. has, legally, more than one wife at once?
4. collects stamps?
5. loves his fellow-men?
6. dislikes his fellow-men?
7. dislikes women?
8. walks in his sleep?
9. preaches the Gospel?
10. copies other people's writings and passes them off for his own?

#### WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

Are the words in italics nouns, pronouns or adjectives?

1. No member of the *working* classes was present.
2. The *Yorkshire* pudding was a failure.
3. *This* watch is reliable.
4. The writer has a gift for treating the *uncanny*.
5. I cannot say *what* happened next.
6. *Eighty* members were present.

7. They have finished *their* work.
8. It is unwise *to attempt* too much.
9. The *going* was hard.
10. That is *where I was born*.

## MISSING LINKS

Fill in the gaps in the following sentences.

1. This is one of the most ambitious projects — have ever been planned.
2. — did you say had come? (*This refers to a person*)
3. The invoices came by today's post, but the goods, — were sent by rail, have not arrived.
4. We have received a consignment by lorry, but the goods — were sent by rail have not arrived.
5. Who was it — said, "Procrastination is the thief of time?"
6. Here is one of those books — contain valuable advice, — should be taken to heart by all conscientious parents.
7. No cynicism, — was seen in his early work, is apparent here.
8. Goods of a lower quality, but — are not definitely shoddy, sell well here.
9. To plead ignorance, — transgressors often do, is no excuse.
10. The pamphlet is intended for firms and private persons — are engaged in trade with South America.

## ERRING RELATIVES

Correct the following sentences.

1. We have noted the clauses in the agreement which you require to be altered.
2. He chose a place which was near his house, and he could see from his bedroom window.
3. We came to the same place as we passed two hours before.
4. Nobody knows what Jones was, or did, during the war.
5. The mark that candidates have either to obtain, or fail, is 40 %.

## TREBLE CHOICES

Arrange the following words in groups of three according to similarity of meaning.

changeable excusable giddy hedonistic laconic  
morose pardonable saturnine sombre succinct  
sybaritical terse venial volatile voluptuous

O.K.?

When is it ALL RIGHT

to write

ALRIGHT?

## CHAPTER VI

### INFINITE (BUT NOT BOUNDLESS) DIFFICULTIES

What are called the infinite parts of the verb are really nouns and adjectives, but to distinguish them from ordinary nouns and adjectives helps one to avoid some common mistakes. There are four infinite parts of the verb:

The infinitive	e.g. to write, to handle, to read, to go.
The gerund	writing, handling, reading, going.
The present participle	writing, handling, reading, going.
The past participle	written, handled, read, gone.

The INFINITIVE is a noun, and can often be replaced by an ordinary noun:

It is necessary *to hurry* = *Hurry* is necessary.

He likes *to study* history = He likes the study of history.

The only practical difficulty with infinitives is the "split infinitive," that is, an infinitive divided by another word, as it is in:

He continued *to* savagely *beat* him.

Yet there does not seem to be any reason for this prohibition, and the works of good writers yield examples of split infinitives. A split infinitive will sometimes give a meaning that is destroyed if the intruding word is moved. Suppose we try to alter:

He was ready to entirely condone illegal practices.

If we write "ready entirely to condone" we may convey the meaning "entirely ready." This is a good example of the difference between speech and prose, for in speech a falling intonation up to "ready," a pause, and a sharp rise of intonation on "entirely" would make it clear that "ready" and "entirely" did not go together. This cannot be shown in writing, so "ready entirely to condone" is ambiguous.

If we write "to condone entirely illegal practices," we get the meaning "entirely illegal." Lastly, it is unsatisfactory to put "entirely" at the very end of the sentence, because "condone" and "entirely" are then too far apart, and have between them



another word, "illegal," which "entirely" could qualify. The writer must therefore choose between keeping a split infinitive and writing a new sentence.

This does not mean that one should split infinitives freely, for too many people regard a split infinitive as a sign of an ignorant or a careless writer. It is best to keep infinitives intact. The main danger is the unnatural sentence written by a person who has tried to remove a split infinitive merely by shifting the intruding word before or after the infinitive. Very often this cannot be done; a completely new sentence must be written. But before making any correction the writer should always ask himself if the intruding word is necessary, for often the best remedy is simply to delete it. In the "to entirely condone" example, the word "entirely" adds little, if anything, to the meaning or emphasis of the sentence.

Both the gerund and the present participle end in -ing, so we can recognise them only by the work they do. The GERUND is a noun. In the sentence,

Reading is a means of broadening the mind,  
"reading" is a gerund. It *names* an action. It could be replaced by an infinitive or an ordinary noun, thus:

To read is a means of broadening the mind.

Study is a means of broadening the mind.

The PRESENT PARTICIPLE is an adjective. It therefore needs a noun or pronoun to support it, and this makes it easy to distinguish from the gerund. In the sentence,

I saw him reading,  
"reading" is an adjective describing "him," and therefore a present participle.

The present participle goes with parts of the verbs "to be" and "to have" to form verbs, such as "am reading," "was reading," "have been reading," "will be reading" and "will have been reading." There is no need to analyse these groups. We do not need to know, for example, that "am reading" consists of "am" plus a present participle. It is enough to know that "am reading" is a verb.

PAST PARTICIPLES likewise form verbs, such as "have written," "had written," "were written," "will be written,"

"will have written" and "will have been written." Otherwise they are merely adjectives when we use them in such expressions as "broken vows," "fallen idols," "departed guests" and "paved streets."

If we understand the difference between a gerund and a present participle we can clear up a worrying problem of sentence construction. This may be illustrated by two examples. Which of the variants below are correct?

I object to Smith coming in late, *or*,  
I object to Smith's coming in late?

He left the room without me noticing, *or*,  
He left the room without my noticing?

"Smith's" and "my" are correct, and if "coming" and "noticing" are recognised as gerunds the reason should be plain. In the first example, the writer does not object to Smith; he objects to lateness. "Coming" is a noun (i.e. a gerund) and "Smith's" is an adjective. This can be clarified as follows: I object to Smith's lateness = I object to the lateness of Smith = I object to the coming in late of Smith = I object to Smith's coming in late.

In the second example, "without" applies to "noticing" and not to "me," which should be replaced by the adjective "my." In both these examples we have an adjective + a noun.

If we now consider the sentence,

The cold being so intense made life arduous,  
we may wonder whether we should not write "cold's," which would certainly look odd. But the shape of the sentence is:

The cold (being so intense) made life arduous.  
Commas could well be inserted in place of the brackets. "Being" is a present participle, an adjective qualifying "cold." We have here a noun + an adjective.

We therefore have two straightforward constructions, an adjective + a gerund, and a noun + a present participle. Difficulties begin when we find ourselves with a third construction which falls between these two. Such a construction is seen in the sentence:

All the fields being waterlogged makes progress impossible.  
Here "fields" is a noun. But, since the verb "makes" is singular,

"being waterlogged" must also be a noun because it is the subject of the sentence; that is, "being" is a gerund. We therefore have here a noun + a noun.

This construction, a noun followed by an -ing word that must be a gerund, is the fused participle, and it usually produces a sentence as inelegant as the last example.

A fused participle is too common an idiom for anyone to condemn it outright and resolve never to use it, but whoever does use it must be cautious. Firstly, he should try always to use the possessive + gerund form with proper names and pronouns, which is one reason for preferring "Smith's coming in late" and "without my noticing." Secondly, he should not use a fused participle with "prevent" or "stop," for he can always insert "from"; if he cannot write "prevent their entering" he can write "prevent them from entering." Thirdly, the fused participle must remain fused, for to separate the two pieces is to invite trouble. The following is about the least clumsy type of sentence one can produce with a fused participle that has been split; usually the result is much more ugly:

The sale of inferior goods resulted in a great *reputation*, which the firm had built up by years of honest trading, *being* almost completely destroyed.

Fortunately, there is always a way of escape for the writer who finds himself in trouble with a fused participle—to use instead of the participle a group of words introduced by "as," "because," "if," "since," "that," "when," "which" or "who." There are many ways of improving the last example; one is to use "because":

Because it sold inferior goods, the firm almost completely destroyed its great reputation, which it had built up by years of honest trading.

Both present and past participles are often put in the wrong places in sentences. A writer will avoid this if he remembers that they are adjectives, and require the support of nouns or pronouns. If he forgets this he may leave a participle unsupported; it will then attach itself to any nearby noun or pronoun, and produce such nonsense as:

Walking through the parched lanes, our clothes became covered with dust.

But it is not enough for the participle to have its noun or pronoun in the sentence. The participle must be in the right place, for if it is too far from its noun or pronoun it will adhere to a nearer noun or pronoun, thus:

Being one of the most authoritative books on the subject, I advise you to study it carefully.

"Being" is here trying to go with "I" instead of "it." The sentence cannot be satisfactorily corrected while "being" is retained, although the meaning can be made clear if the sentence is re-arranged, very clumsily, as:

This being one of the most authoritative books on the subject, I advise you to study it carefully.

The only effective way of dealing with such a sentence is to get rid of the participle by introducing "as," "because," "since," "if," "that," "when," "which" or "who." A possible correction is:

As this is one of the most authoritative books on the subject, I advise you to study it carefully.

People are sometimes confused because there are some words which look like participles, but which are used without the support of nouns or pronouns. The commonest of these words are:

allowing for: barring: coming to: concerning: considering:  
counting: excepting: excluding: failing: granting: including:  
owing to: providing: regarding: respecting: seeing: speaking  
of: talking about: using.

Most of these can also be used when they are made to end in -ed instead of -ing. They can be used unsupported, as in the following sentences:

Counting the officials, there were fifty people present.

Considering the difficulties, that is a creditable effort.

Talking about holidays, what are your plans this year?

The list does not include "referring" and "due to," both of which are often wrongly used. The construction,

Referring to paragraph two of your letter, I find that you state that black is white,

is correct, for "referring" is supported by "I." The following shows a common error:

Referring to paragraph two of your letter, you state that black is white.

The writer probably intended to ask the reader to look at paragraph two, wherein he would find the statement "black is white." But the sentence means that the writer of the letter, in the course of some remarks about paragraph two of that letter, asserted that black was white. We have to assume that the writer of the example did not mean what he wrote, and then guess what he did mean. A writer of this kind of sentence will often put a colon or semi-colon after "referring." This makes matters worse, for the sentence is than both grammatically bad and wrongly punctuated.

The person who misuses "due to" usually writes an ugly rather than an ambiguous sentence. "Due to" is an adjective, and a simple way to avoid mistakes is to resolve to use it in only two ways. First, it is always correct when it immediately follows its supporting noun or pronoun, thus:

Absence due to illness has decreased.

Floods due to abnormally high tides caused much damage. Secondly, it is correct when it follows its supporting noun or pronoun and is separated from it only by a verb, thus:

His absence was due to illness.

The floods were due to abnormally high tides.

"Due to" must be supported by a single noun or pronoun. It cannot be supported by a general idea that the reader gathers from a group of words. The following is wrong:

The project was abandoned, due to lack of money.

Here "due to" is supported by the general idea that the project was abandoned. It must therefore be changed to "owing to" or "because of," for each of these expressions can be supported either by a single word or by a general idea. Alternatively, but not very satisfactorily, "due to" can be given a noun to support it—"abandonment":

The abandonment of the project was due to lack of money.

If there is any doubt whether "due to" is correct, it should be changed to "owing to" or "because of." Better still, the writer can use "as," "because," "for," or "since," thus:

The project was abandoned, because they had not enough money.

## VERBAL EXCHANGES

Assiduous	means	persevering, pestering, sly?
Bucolic	„	diseased, drunken, rustic?
Equivocal	„	impartial, of equal tone, questionable?
Implacable	„	relentless, tranquil, unreserved?
Importunate	„	lucky, pressing, significant?
Improvident	„	extempore, superior, thriftless?
Indigent		contemptuous, lazy, penniless?
Sedulous		attractive, diligent, rebellious?
Trenchant	„	cutting, inclining, delving?
Turgid	„	cloudy, swollen, tumultuous?

## WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?

What parts of speech are the words in italics?

1. *Travelling* all night is tiresome.
2. The troops *leading* the advance found that *exposing* themselves for a second was fatal.
3. They let us *stay* the night.
4. The baggage, carefully *wrapped* in canvas, was put on board.
5. He was stretched on the grass, *sleeping* peacefully.

## AWKWARD CUSTOMERS

Are the following sentences right or wrong? Correct them where necessary.

1. I do not object to you borrowing the bicycle.
2. He was suffering from depression, caused by his wife having been killed in a road accident.
3. The odds against a horse that has not been carefully trained winning the race are enormous.
4. The opening scene presents an old gentleman leaving his club in the early hours of the morning.
5. Members of the audience constantly lighting cigarettes during the performance upsets the actors.

## RESCUE WORK

Correct the following sentences.

1. Calling upon him yesterday, he kindly offered me the use of his country cottage.

2. Having travelled almost across Europe on foot, the journey from Dover to London meant little to him.
3. While taking into account the difficulties of race and religion, it is yet possible that a leader will arise to unite the people.
4. He was known to completely have misunderstood the message.
5. Having silenced the enemy's guns, there was no reason why our advance should not continue.
6. Due to the meeting at 4 o'clock, the letters will have to be finished by 3.30 today.
7. Even without understanding the language, the menace in the men's voices could be detected.
8. The shareholders thought that the proposals were rash, and, unless modified, they would lose money.
9. The scheme has great possibilities, and it ought to most thoroughly and diligently be examined.
10. Referring to your letter of 9th June, our representative will call on you next week.

#### UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

You will find that most people will agree that at least one of the following is right:

A protagonist is the opposite of an antagonist.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

A leading question is one that goes right to the heart of the matter.

"The exception proves the rule" means that the existence of an exception proves the existence of the rule.

#### HOLIDAY HINT

Is there anything wrong with the following?

If you intend to visit the seaside in August, it is a fatal mistake not to book your accommodation well in advance.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTO ACTION

#### OR VIVISECTING THE VERBS

A TRANSITIVE VERB is a verb that has an object. The object of a verb can be discovered by answering a question constructed:

Subject + verb + what? or whom?

If we apply this formula to the sentence,

He pitched his tent on the common,

we get:

He pitched what?

The answer, "tent," is the object of "pitched," which is therefore a transitive verb. A verb that has no object is intransitive. In the sentence,

I was writing letters all the afternoon,

"was writing" has the object "letters," and is transitive; but in "I was writing all the afternoon" "was writing" has no object, and is intransitive. Most English verbs can be either transitive or intransitive according to how they are used.

Transitive verbs must not be confused with verbs such as those in the following sentences:

This *seems* a reasonable suggestion.

The plan *proved* impracticable.

These *will become* your property.

These sentences seem to give answers to the question "subject + verb + what? or whom?" These verbs, however, are exactly like the verb "to be" (see page 16); they only show the relationship between two aspects of the same thing or person or idea. They are intransitive.

This explanation may raise doubts about sentences such as:

He killed himself.

I flung myself down on the grass.

"Killed" and "flung" are here transitive, but the subjects and objects certainly refer to the same person. The explanation is that in these sentences we are thinking of the mind and the body



separately. The mind ("he" and "I") performs an action on the body ("himself" and "myself").

There are three types of sentence that frequently trap us into making mistakes with the verb. The first is the sentence that has for its subject "each," "none," "either," or "neither." Each of these verbs is always treated as singular. We must write:

Each of the guests has to produce his invitation.

None of the guests has to produce his invitation.

Either of them is going.

Neither of them is going.

Some people are always tempted to write "have to produce" and "are going." They must resist the temptation.

The same sort of difficulty occurs with sentences that have two subjects linked by "or" or "nor." The following are correct:

Neither he nor I am going.

They or she is going.

Either he or they are going.

Neither they nor he is going.

The verb agrees with the nearer of the two subjects.

The most dangerous sentences, however, are those in this form:

This is one of the most important books that have appeared. To write "has appeared" would be a very common mistake. "Have" is required, because "that" refers to "books" and not to "one." This mistake is most likely to occur in lengthy or complicated sentences. It occurs in the following:

It is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant speeches that has been delivered in the course of this spirited debate. There are two ways of checking these sentences. The first is to expand them, thus:

Important books have appeared. This is one of them.

Brilliant speeches have been delivered in the course of this spirited debate. This is undoubtedly one of them.

The correct verbs, "have appeared" and "have been delivered," then emerge automatically. The second method is to delete everything in the sentence up to and including "one of," and to complete the sentence by adding any suitable words.

The most important books that have appeared . . . were written by Englishmen.

The most brilliant speeches that have been delivered in the course of this spirited debate . . . came from backbenchers. Again, the correct verbs will appear automatically.

The ACTIVE and PASSIVE voices of verbs are easily recognised.

We all make mistakes,  
is active. To make it passive, we must make the object, "mistakes," the subject of the sentence, thus:

Mistakes are made by all of us.

Passive constructions often cause involved sentences. This danger, and the legitimate uses of the passive, are discussed in Chapter XI, so we need consider here only two common errors. The first is the "double passive," for example:

A committee is intended to be formed.

The writer of this tried to make a passive form of:

They intend to form a committee.

He failed because he did not see that the object of "intend" is not "committee," but the whole group of words "to form a committee." By making this the subject, he could have arrived at a possible passive construction:

To form a committee is their intention.

He treated "committee" both as the object of "to form," which it is, and as the object of "intend," which it is not. "Double passives" are easily recognised, and should be corrected.

The second error is seen in:

The goods will be carefully packed, and the crates sealed,  
as we did with your last order.

This sentence should be made active throughout:

We will pack the goods carefully, and seal the crates, as  
we did with your last order.

A correct, but much less satisfactory, sentence can be made by putting the whole sentence into the passive voice:

The goods will be carefully packed, and the crates sealed,  
as was done with your last order.

Writers are sometimes puzzled by the remnants of the almost extinct SUBJUNCTIVE forms of verbs, which were used to express matters of doubt, supposition, desire or remote con-

dition, a thing which in modern English we do by using the verbs "may," "let" or "shall." One still meets sentences made on the model of "If this be error . . ." and "If he have a real claim . . .," where "be" and "have" are subjunctives, but these nowadays seem stilted. Further, it is easy to make a mistake with these unfamiliar subjunctives. For example, it is correct, though old-fashioned, to write:

If this be proved, and the man be sent to prison, his family will suffer.

It is equally correct, and more usual, to write:

If this is proved, and the man is sent to prison, his family will suffer.

It is incorrect to write:

If this be proved, and the man is sent to prison, his family will suffer.

Once a person knows what a subjunctive is, he need only use his common sense to avoid this error. A writer who is not a grammarian should avoid the subjunctive altogether except in the types of sentence that are explained below.

After a part of the verb "wish" or the word "if," "were" should be used instead of "was" with a singular subject. (It is an accident that the ordinary plural and the subjunctive singular are the same word.) After "wish" we have such sentences as:

I wish he were here.

We wish that your request were more reasonable.

She is always wishing that I were not so far away.

"Were" is used after "if" to emphasise that what follows is a supposition, not a fact. Examples are:

If I were you, I would go.

If it were here, I would give it to you.

If he were present, he would answer your accusation.

If he were twice as clever as he is, he would still be stupid.

If the decision were mine, I would say "Yes."

### *ENTER SAINT PATRICK, WHO SLEW THE SERPENTS*

When we can recognise a finite verb, are we any better off?

You are if you will use them. The more finite verbs you

use, the better your prose will be. They will, for example, slay the serpents.

The unwanted abstract nouns?

There are other ways of destroying them, but the finite verb is the best. We might write: "The scheme failed owing to lack of support by the public." If we use a finite verb, we get: "The scheme failed because the public did not support it." That is a better sentence. Whenever you are in doubt about your meaning or your grammar, and whenever you want to be brief, use a finite verb.

#### PRACTICE BOUT

Use finite verbs to slay the serpents in the following sentences.

1. The police warned motorists with regard to the dangerous condition of the roads across the moors.
2. The place is unsuitable for an airport, owing to the prevalence of foggy weather.
3. Food was unobtainable on account of our inability to make ourselves understood by the natives.
4. This occurred previous to the publication of the report.
5. He was fully in agreement with the statement that had been made by the chairman.

#### CHALKS AND CHEESES

Pick out the pairs of words that are most nearly opposite in meaning.

amenable	anomalous	astute	docile	evanescent
flagitious	florid	honourable	inexorable	lenient
naïve	normal	obstinate	permanent	refractory
	resilient	stiff	unadorned	

#### RINGING THE CHANGES

Use the following words (*a*) as nouns; (*b*) as verbs.

bowl	end	show	stand	value
------	-----	------	-------	-------

Use the following words (*c*) as adjectives; (*d*) as verbs.

chill	clean	open	smooth	stray
-------	-------	------	--------	-------

## ANY OBJECTS?

Pick out the transitive verbs in the following sentences.

1. His own evidence convicted him.
2. The building will be a landmark.
3. The fortress was believed impregnable.
4. Experiments proved the calculations to be correct.
5. They did not believe a word of his story.

## REACHING COMPLETE AGREEMENT

Choose the correct verbs.

1. Their only hope was/were the signal fires they had left burning.
2. The child's parents or guardian is/are responsible.
3. What puzzles beginners is/are the numerous exceptions to the rules.
4. This promises to be one of the most sensational cases that has/have ever appeared before the courts.
5. It depends upon what the chairman or his deputy decides/decide.

## LAME DOGS

Correct the following sentences.

1. Each of them went out every morning exercising their dogs.
2. If the work be attempted, and leads to a loss of money, who will be responsible for the debts?
3. Important reforms are intended to be carried out shortly.
4. If I was in your place, I would accept his offer.
5. Such an ambitious scheme cannot be carried out, as we attempted to do last year, at a moment's notice.

## TRIPLE ALLIANCES

aspersion augury cataclysm catastrophe crisis cure  
 encomium exigency inundation lucidity obloquy  
 panacea panegyric perception perspicacity  
 perspicuity portent vagary visitation whim

From the foregoing list pick out pairs of words that approximate in meaning to each of the following:

acumen calamity calumny caprice clarity deluge  
emergency eulogy omen remedy

NOT ENOUGH SCENE SHIFTERS?

What is wrong with:

"The theatre cannot present a crowd scene as well as the cinema"?

## CHAPTER VIII

### ADJUSTING THE ADVERBS

### PLACING THE PREPOSITIONS

### CONTROLLING THE CONJUNCTIONS

The ADVERB must be supported by another word. It may work with a verb, to form a question or to specify how, when, where or why an action occurred. Examples are:

*Where* did he go?

The work was *beautifully* executed.

The building was *recently* repaired.

The meeting will be held *here*.

He *purposely* kept us waiting.

It may qualify an adjective, as it does in,

It was an *extremely* difficult task,  
or another adverb, as in:

The work was *very* beautifully executed.

It may even qualify a preposition or conjunction. In the following examples, "on" is a preposition and "because" is a conjunction:

He stopped *exactly* on the line.

He succeeded *simply* because he worked hard.

With verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions the adverb does much the same job as the adjective does with nouns and pronouns. It describes and specifies, and it restricts the application of the word it works with. There are groups of words which form adverb equivalents, simple groups being "at present," "by all means," "if possible," "now and then" and "how long." Other groups may be long and complicated, for example:

*As soon as I reached the top of the hill*, I shouted.

*When he arrives home after the day's work*, he likes to sit  
*by the fire*.

Although many words commonly used as adverbs end in -ly,

this is not a mark of the adverb, for some words that cannot be adverbs have this ending—"kingly" is one of them. Moreover, many words used solely as adverbs do not end in -ly; common ones are "ago," "almost," "before," "here," "never," "now," "once," "perhaps," "quite," "seldom" and "very."

The ruffian who threatened, "If you don't come here quick I'll knock your block off," used the adjective "quick" when he should have used the adverb "quickly." This mistake of using an adjective for an adverb commonly occurs only in the writing of uneducated persons, but if the ruffian had said either, "If you don't come here quicker I'll knock your block off," or "You don't come quick enough for me," he would have committed an error that more cultured people sometimes commit. It is not uncommon, even in writing, to find:

You will get there quicker by train, *for*

You will get there more quickly by train:

It was difficult to write quick enough, *for*

It was difficult to write quickly enough.

Oscar Wilde committed this blunder when he wrote:

"On and on plodded the hansom, going slower, it seemed to him, at each step."<sup>1</sup>

Not only "quickly" and "slowly," but all adverbs qualified by "more," "most," "enough" and "too" are traps for the unwary. When in doubt whether to write (to continue with "quickly" as a typical adverb) "quicker" or "more quickly," "quickest" or "most quickly," "quick enough" or "quickly enough," "too quick" or "too quickly," the writer must ask himself: if the word is an adjective, where is its noun or pronoun?

It's quicker by train,  
is correct, for "quicker" is an adjective qualifying "it," a pronoun standing for "journey."

Badly placed adverbs often cause clumsy sentences. They are badly placed when the writer is afraid of splitting some such verb group as "to be written," "am writing," "have written," "can write," "must be written" or "ought to be written." But,

<sup>1</sup> *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*



oblivious *of*. None the less, we should try to get these prepositions right, and consult a dictionary when we are in doubt. We should not write "different to" or "different than" for "different from," or "continue with the work" for "continue the work." Some words with which people frequently use the wrong prepositions will be found among the questions at the end of this chapter.

By tacking a preposition on to a verb we can form a new verb, with a meaning of its own. The best example is "get," from which we have made "get up," "get over," "get down," "get through" and dozens of others. There is no point, however, in adding prepositions unnecessarily. One meets such compounds as "to study up," "to meet up with," "to hasten up," "to slacken off," "to nerve up" and "to face up to." Anyone in doubt whether to use one of these compounds should ask himself two questions: do we get a new meaning by adding the preposition, and is the new meaning one for which a satisfactory word does not exist? If the answer to each question is a firm "Yes," he may use the compound. But he must be very strict. When eighteen people were asked if "to study up" was different from "to study," only four said it was. The first of these could not say what the difference was; the second said "to study up" meant "to revise"; the third said it meant "to study intensely," and the fourth said it meant "to study with a particular aim in view." It is therefore clear that if "studying up" is different from "studying" nobody knows what the difference is.

With prepositions we meet a problem like that of the split infinitive. It is the preposition at the end of a sentence. A sentence may sometimes be given a neater shape, an important word may be put in a conspicuous position, or a relative may be brought nearer the word it refers to if a preposition is moved away from the end of the sentence. It is right to do so if one has a reason, but there is no rule against ending a sentence with a preposition. It makes no difference whether we write:

He is not the sort of man you should give money to, *or*

He is not the sort of man to whom you should give money.  
Most great writers of the past have frequently ended sentences with prepositions, and good writers of today do so.

The danger of the prejudice against a preposition at the end

of a sentence is that some people will always mechanically move a preposition into the body of a sentence and assume that the sentence must then be all right. It is often very far from all right, particularly if it ends with a verb such as "to get rid of," "to do away with," or "to put up with." We find ourselves with "the sort of English up with which we cannot put." The writer who will not have a preposition at the end of his sentence often has to write a new sentence. The nurse who said to the small boy, "What did you tear the book you were being read to out of up for?" did not achieve an elegant sentence. But no one can improve it by moving the prepositions from the end.

CONJUNCTIONS are easily understood. Those such as "and" and "but" are simple links. They give the reader a pause for rest and thought, and warn him that a particular piece of meaning is unfinished. But conjunctions are more than links. There are those that work in pairs, such as "either . . . or," "neither . . . nor," "both . . . and," "not only . . . but," and "so . . . as." These bind the parts of a sentence together, and lure the reader on; having read "either," he knows that "or" is coming, so he reads on until he has found it. Hence these conjunctions must be kept in their proper pairs. One should never make such illegal unions as "either . . . nor" and "not only . . . and."

Other conjunctions are signposts to tell the reader that the coming groups of words will express an idea in a certain relationship to the one before or after it. "As," "because" and "since" indicate that a reason will be given; "if" signals a condition or hypothesis; "for," "then" and "so" announce an inference; "or," "either," "nor" and "neither" indicate a choice; "so" and "hence" announce a result. These conjunctions help a reader to follow the thought, and they also make prose condensed and exact. We use them more freely when we write than we do when we speak.

Conjunctions do not present many problems, but there are three points worth mentioning. The first is the question of beginning a sentence with a conjunction. It is permissible to do so, but it should not be done too much. Conjunctions as opening words encourage slack sentences and monotonous writing.

The second point is the unnecessary doubling of conjunctions and propping of them with other words. It is a waste of time to write:

I do not approve, but yet I shall have to go.  
“But” is sufficient by itself, and “yet” does not, as the writer hoped, give emphasis. If emphasis is required, it can only be obtained by reshaping the sentence in some such form as:

Although I do not approve, I shall have to go.  
Doubled conjunctions that occur fairly frequently are “and . . . however,” “but . . . however” and “as . . . therefore.” The most common lapse of all, however, is the propping up of “whether” by “as to.” “Whether” is quite able to stand alone, and there is no need to write “the question as to whether” or “doubt as to whether.”

Thirdly, the conjunction that causes much bad writing is “while.” As a conjunction, this can be used with two meanings. It can show that two actions took place at the same time. The simplest use of it, and one with which mistakes are not made, is in sentences of the type:

While he drove, he talked to me.

A more complicated sentence is that in which some words are omitted, as in:

While driving, he was talking to me.

This is a contraction of:

While he was driving, he was talking to me.

Mistakes occur when people forget what words they have left out, and they do this most frequently when they use “while” with its second meaning, that of “although” or “whereas.”

While yours is the larger house, mine is the more comfortable,  
is correct. The following is wrong:

While being ready to accept your conditions, we are bound to say that we do so with regret.  
If this sentence is expanded, it becomes, “While we are being ready . . .” “Being” must be deleted.

The greatest danger with this use of “while” in the sense of “whereas” is that we may easily fall into the bad habit of using it carelessly as though it meant “and” or “but.”

This sooner or later leads to stupid sentences, such as the following, the first of which requires "and," the second "but":

He sang two songs by Puccini, while the orchestra played a selection from "Tannhäuser."

I went on Saturday, while my brother went on Monday.

#### WAGGING THEIR TAILS BEHIND THEM

What prepositions are used after the following words?  
 acquiesce   adverse   averse   comment   consequent  
 dissimilar   equally   independent   oblivious   sensible

#### IDENTIFICATION PARADE

What parts of speech are the words in italics?

1. We seldom get this *quite* right at the first attempt.
2. The village lay *among* green hills.
3. It is difficult to place it *just* in the middle.
4. The house was *nowhere* near the road.
5. I will go *if* you tell me to.
6. You may go *now*.
7. We cannot go on *because* there have been heavy falls of snow.
8. *In spite of* opposition, they carried out their plans.
9. It must be done *regardless of expense*.
10. They travelled *far* over the country.

#### LABOUR EXCHANGE

Use the following words: (a) as adjectives; (b) as adverbs.  
 hard   clear   fast   most   high

#### COMING TO FITTING ENDS

Would it be advisable to recast any of the following sentences?

1. The actor had gone to his room to make up.
2. This is the man I gave all the books and papers and photographs to.
3. We cannot find the letter you referred to.

## SUNDRY SNARES

Correct the following sentences.

1. My reason for leaving early was because there are no convenient trains in the evening.
2. The new method is equally as efficient as the old, and much cheaper.
3. Every one of the documents should be checked, but that, however, is too large a task.
4. There is now some doubt as to whether the law will ever come into force.
5. He not only lost his money, but also his reputation.

## WANDERING WILLIES

Move the adverbs or adverb equivalents in the following sentences into better positions.

1. The real purpose of the scheme seems completely to have been overlooked.
2. The disease has now been stamped out, and it may confidently be said that it is unlikely to reappear.
3. His dispute with the guide kept for nearly half an hour the whole party standing about in the hot sun.
4. We receive dozens of testimonials, which always are quite unsolicited.
5. We only supply these goods in one quality.
6. He tried to fashion, to the best of his ability, a new career from the ruins of the old.
7. Far-sighted business men already are preparing plans to develop these new markets.
8. We advise, therefore, beginners not to attempt these exercises without the aid of a teacher.
9. When carefully examined, the theory will be found fundamentally to be unsound.
10. Drivers of cars that are not properly maintained are endangering, day after day, the lives of themselves and their fellow citizens.

## TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE

What are the differences in meaning between the following?

admit of	admit to	
compete in	compete with	
continue	continue in	continue at
agree to	agree with	
concerned about	concerned in	concerned with
concur in	concur with	
correspond to	correspond with	
vexed at	vexed with	

## TAILPIECE

Which sentence would you write, and why?

Whilst the family was at dinner, a burglar ransacked the bedrooms.

While the family was at dinner, a burglar ransacked the bedrooms.

## LIGHT THE BLUE PAPER AND RETIRE OR THE EFFECTS OF WORDS

When we try to state facts we sometimes fail because our words only arouse our reader's emotions. Moreover, we often do not realise that our means of communication has broken down in this way.

To understand this breakdown, we must know that a word affects us in two ways. When a person hears or reads a word as simple as "dog," two things happen. First, he understands that someone is referring to a certain animal; that is, he understands what the word means. Secondly—although he is usually unconscious of this—the word brings back memories of experiences he has had with real dogs, and he remembers the emotions he felt when he had those experiences. A person who had had a very unpleasant experience with dogs might even shudder. But most people would feel only a slight pleasure, sympathy, approval, excitement, amusement, disgust or fear, and not be aware that their emotions had been stirred at all. This is the emotional effect of the word.

Some words have little emotional effect, and convey almost pure fact. Good examples are technical words, such as "cam-shaft," "microscope," "catalogue" and "femur." Other words are highly charged with emotion, and have little factual meaning. "Ideals," "democracy," "freedom," "slavery," "bourgeois" and "middle classes" are obvious examples, but other words of this kind are less easy to recognise.

One difficulty is that we often confuse the emotional effect of a word with its meaning. When we acquire such a word as "democracy" or "ideals" we pick up, not a precise meaning, but the emotions we usually feel when we hear or read the word. It is therefore easy for us to be pleased, angered, confused or frightened by such words as "democracy," "communism," "eternity" or "oppression." We may not know clearly what

they refer to, or whether they refer to anything at all. It is worth while collecting a list of words that should be treated with suspicion, beginning with "absolutism" and working through "barbarity" and "capitalism" to "worldliness."

A second difficulty is that the emotional effects of words are more powerful than their meanings. Words such as "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," "Play the Game," and "Man is Born Free" will be found behind the movements of thought and ideas of behaviour that have shaped civilisation. Such words are powerful because they cause the same emotions in large numbers of people; each individual either puts his own meaning into them, usually not a precise one, or he accepts them without bothering whether they have any meaning at all.

The emotional effects of words are also the basis of imaginative writing, especially poetry. They are the foundation of the emotional prose that was described in Chapter 1, but to the writer who aims at stating facts these emotional effects of words are a nuisance.

There is nothing wrong or stupid in using words for their emotional effects as long as the writer realises he is doing this, and does not suppose that he is stating facts. If the sentence, "Magna Carta was a great victory in the struggle to achieve the liberty of the individual," were read to a number of people, many of them would agree that it stated a fact which they understood. Whether the fact is correct or not does not matter. If they were then asked to write down the meanings of "struggle," "liberty" and "individual," some would produce no answers, others would dodge the question by writing "conflict," "freedom" and "person," and from the rest would come widely different answers. If therefore the writer of the sentence had any clear fact in his mind he has failed to convey it to more than perhaps one or two of his readers. As factual writing, the sentence is bad. But if the writer intended no more than to kindle a mood of vague approval in his readers, the sentence is all right.

The writer of factual prose must get into the habit of distinguishing between what a word means—that is, the thing or idea it refers to—and the emotions it causes. Suppose a person



was trying to report honestly and factually what happened at a political meeting. He might write:

Some of the audience applauded the speech, but others continually heckled the speaker.

He refers to three things, the speech, the applause, and the heckling. A friend of the man who made the speech would have the same three facts to work with, but he would want to create approval of the speech and the applause, and disapproval of the heckling. He might write:

Attempts by a small rowdy element to create a disturbance were overwhelmed by the enthusiastic applause which greeted his far-sighted proposals.

An opponent of the man who made the speech would want to create disapproval of the speech and the applause, and approval of the heckling. He might write:

His reckless propaganda won him support from the mob, but the thinking people in the audience plied him with pertinent questions.

The last two versions are attempts to create prejudice, not statements of facts. There is no harm in writing like this, as long as the writer knows quite well that he is not stating facts.

We do not find this kind of writing only in politics and other controversial matters. Anyone might write such a sentence as:

It looked a quaint old cottage, but we found it an insanitary hovel.

"Quaint old cottage" and "insanitary hovel" both refer to the same object. The emotional effects they produce are very different, but they cannot have much difference in *meaning*. They are really describing the writer's attitude towards the object. If we say, "This is a man," we state a fact. If we say, "This is a tall man," we add a second fact. If, on the other hand, we say, "This is a good man," we have not added a second fact. We have indicated our attitude towards the first fact; we have tried to evoke a kindly emotion—approval—in our audience.

The habit of distinguishing between meaning and emotion is most valuable to the factual writer, and it is not difficult to acquire. The writer should sometimes go over something he has written and mark with an "F" all the words that convey mainly fact, and with an "E" those that are more emotional

than factual. If he then looks carefully at the words marked "E" he will find ways of making the passage clearer and more concise.

If one starts collecting words that have vague meanings and high emotional power one finds that most of them are abstract nouns. We cannot, of course, avoid using abstract nouns, but if we understand how dangerous they are to factual writing we may avoid the more obvious pitfalls.

The first danger is of using an abstract noun without having a clear idea what it means. A person will often assume that because he is familiar with a word he understands the thing or idea it refers to. Here is a simple test. When next, in ordinary conversation, a person mentions "inferiority complex," suggest to him that "anxiety neurosis" would be more appropriate, and he will usually agree with you. You need not know what an anxiety neurosis is. The person who mentioned "inferiority complex" will not know either, or he would not be ready to interchange the two terms. This test rarely fails.

Firstly then, a writer must be sure of the meaning of an abstract noun before he uses it. But even when he knows this, there is another pitfall before him, for he may assume that the word will mean the same to everybody else as it does to him. This is not always so. It may be a word such as "faith," "belief," "goodness," or "justice," which does not refer to anything precise; or it may be a word like "sensation," "appearance," "reality," or "impression," which have different meanings according to how they are used. The writer must understand by the meaning of a word, not what is in his own mind, or even what is in the dictionary, but what his reader will understand by that word. A student of Karl Marx cannot complain if when he writes the word "Communism" his readers take it to mean something quite different from the doctrine of Marx. When a writer has to use a word which may be misunderstood he should begin by defining what he means by it, and be careful to use it in that sense only. Even if a definition is not necessary, he must be careful not to use a word in different senses without indicating that he is doing so.

Another pitfall is "playing with words." It is easy to spin

words together, particularly abstract nouns, without thinking what they mean.

"Suppose someone to assert: *The gostak distims the doshes*. You do not know what this means; nor do I. But if we assume that it is English, we know that *the doshes are distimmed by the gostak*. We know too that *one distimmer of doshes is a gostak*. If, moreover, the *doshes* are *galloons*, we know that *some galloons are distimmed by the gostak*. And so we may go on, and so we often do go on."<sup>1</sup>

The above was written to illustrate this "playing with words." Does not the following passage by Carlyle resemble it?

"Sure enough, of all paths a man could strike into, there *is*, at any given moment, a *best path* for every man; a thing which, here and now, it were of all things *wisest* for him to do;—which could he be but led or driven to do, he were then 'doing like a man,' as we phrase it; all men and gods agreeing with him, the whole Universe virtually exclaiming Well-done to him! His success, in such case, were complete; his felicity a maximum. This path, to find this path and walk in it, is the one thing needful for him. Whatsoever forwards him in that, let it come to him even in the shape of blows and spurnings, is liberty; whatsoever hinders him . . . is slavery."<sup>2</sup>

To discover what meaning this has, try to express in one sentence what Carlyle is writing about, and notice how difficult it is to do so; then compare the result with other people's answers to the same question. Alternatively, ask a number of people to say what Carlyle means by "liberty," "universe," "slavery" and "path." The passage may be defended as emotional writing, but it is bad factual prose.

Three pitfalls have been described. To guard against them, here is the most valuable advice that can be given to a writer:

*If ever you find yourself thinking, about anything you have written, "Everyone knows what that means," cross out the whole passage at once.*

"Everyone knows what that means" is our defence when we ourselves do not know clearly what we mean. There is no need to think again about the passage. Nobody will know what it

<sup>1</sup> A. Ingraham, *Swain School Lectures*; quoted by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*, Chapter II.

<sup>2</sup> *Past and Present*.

means. The writer must cross it out, get his thoughts clear, and begin again. This is a harsh discipline, but the results are worth while.

*NEVER EXCUSE YOURSELF WITH "EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT THAT MEANS"*

Unfortunately, people love using abstract nouns when they write or when they speak formally. One trick by which the unwanted abstract nouns creep in is the vile "abstract appendage." In the following list, the abstract appendages are on the right:

a very difficult task	<i>a task of great difficulty</i>
unimportant events	<i>events of little importance</i>
inferior goods	<i>goods of inferior quality</i>
controversial matters	<i>matters of controversy</i>
a fairly large task	<i>a task of some magnitude</i>
an intelligent person	<i>a person of intelligence</i>
a well-bred animal	<i>an animal of good breeding</i>
a moderately powerful engine	<i>an engine of moderate power</i>
an unusually violent storm	<i>a storm of unusual violence</i>
an unexpectedly severe punishment	<i>a punishment of unexpected severity</i>

A skilled writer may occasionally use an abstract appendage effectively, but the ordinary person is wise if he leaves such dangerous things entirely alone. He will lose nothing, and be likely to gain much.

*ABHOR THE ABSTRACT APPENDAGE*

Unwanted abstract nouns of course creep in by other ways. To repeat what was stressed in Chapter VII, it is best to remove them by introducing finite verbs.

There is no obligation for you to attend, *should be*  
 You are not obliged to attend, *or* You need not attend.

The leader must have the ability to make quick decisions, *should be*

The leader must be able to decide quickly.

It is not always convenient, however, to introduce a finite verb. Then an adjective or an adverb will effectively remove an abstract noun. *A high degree of skill* can become *much skill*; *the library contains a preponderance of novels* can become *the library contains mainly novels*; *in the first instance* can become *firstly*.

The first and the last of these examples introduce two of 'the muddled thinker's best friends'—which deserve a rogues gallery of their own.

### THE MUDDLED THINKER'S BEST FRIENDS

AS TO

CASE

CHARACTER

CONDITION

CONSIDERATION—*especially* CONSIDERATION WITH REGARD TO

DEGREE

FROM THE—POINT OF VIEW

INASMUCH AS

IN CONNECTION WITH

IN REFERENCE TO

IN RELATION TO

IN RESPECT OF

IN SO FAR AS

IN THAT

IN THE REGION OF

INSTANCE—*especially* IN THE MAJORITY OF INSTANCES  
NATURE

POSITION—*especially* THE POSITION IN REGARD TO

WITH REGARD TO

WITH RESPECT TO

WITH A VIEW TO

The writer should learn "the muddled thinker's best friends" by heart and train himself to regard them as danger signals. Whenever he has written one of them, he should ask himself: is the sentence accurate? He may have written something like this:

In a large number of cases the goods were sent direct to the purchasers.

This is inaccurate. Were all the goods sent (packed in cases), or were most of them sent? This is the kind of sentence that is defended by "*Everyone knows what that means.*" The writer is asking the reader to guess.

Secondly, whenever he has used one of these dangerous expressions, the writer should ask: are the words necessary?

The position will soon be reached when the country is flooded with these articles, *means no more than*

The country will soon be flooded with these articles.

This is news of a serious character (or nature), *means*  
This is serious news.

He was paid five pounds in respect of services rendered,  
*means*

He was paid five pounds for services rendered.

From the point of view of durability, steel fences are better than wooden ones, *means*

Steel fences last longer than wooden ones.

Some people will abandon these expressions reluctantly, arguing that they must mean something because they appear so frequently in print. The answer is to consider where they appear. They will be found frequently in business letters, in government publications, and in books and articles by men who are experts on a particular subject—that is, in amateur writing. If one looks at the work of a professional, an author or journalist whose sole job is writing, one will seldom find them. They will occur sometimes, for they are occasionally justified. But to decide

when they are justified requires fine judgment and the experience of a professional writer; the person whose main business is not writing, and who is not prepared to serve an apprenticeship at it, is safer if he shuns them entirely.

People sometimes object: "If we remove all the expressions you condemn, and aim only to be accurate, clear and concise, our writing will be bare and monotonous, and that surely is a disadvantage even in factual writing." This is a fallacy. The person who avoids ready-made expressions will write brightly, for he will be clothing his own thoughts in his own words. He has, of course, to go to the trouble of finding his own words, but this trouble is well worth while.

In choosing our words, we must seek the accurate word, that is, the word that most exactly expresses our meaning. For every thought we have there is probably one word that is more appropriate than any other word, for all words convey slightly different effects. For example, "fraternal" and "brotherly" are not quite the same, nor are "dawn" and "sunrise," nor are "to seize" and "to snatch." Nor are the following sentences quite the same:

I think so.

That is my opinion.

That is what I believe.

Yet these words and sentences hardly differ in meaning. The differences are in the emotional effects they convey. The writer of factual prose, therefore, need not be afraid to change his words, if by doing so he can make a clearer or simpler sentence, or avoid grammatical difficulties. He may slightly alter the emotional effect of his sentence, but this need not mean that his meaning has been changed at all. This applies particularly when the writer finds himself using unusual words, long words, or words of obviously foreign origin. The factual writer should not use an unfamiliar word unless he is sure that it expresses his meaning more exactly than a homely word would do.

\*

\*

\*

\*

## FACTS AND FANCIES

The following words are often wrongly or carelessly used with the meanings shown against them. What are the correct meanings of the words, and which of the meanings given below are definitely wrong?

aggravate	is used to mean annoy
anticipate	„ „ „ expect
conducive to	„ „ „ liable to
feel	„ „ „ think
individual	„ „ „ a person
mutual	„ „ „ common (e.g. a mutual foe, for a common foe)
transpire	„ „ „ happen

## CUTTING THE CACKLE

Rewrite the following sentences more directly. Notice "the muddled thinker's best friends."

1. This work is of a tiring character, for it demands a high degree of concentration.
2. In most cases the accommodation supplied was of a temporary character only.
3. It is imperative that you discover at once what the position is in regard to the number of machines at present available.
4. This play from the production point of view entails no serious difficulties.
5. My suspicions in connection with the dishonesty of these men were confirmed in the majority of instances.

## HELL-BREW

The following is a paraphrase of a passage from *Saint Joan*. Rewrite as directly as possible. (Joan is speaking.)

I am not prepared, now or at any time in the future, to commit myself to the state of matrimony. As a result of this steady reluctance on my part, legal proceedings on the grounds of breach of promise were initiated against me by a plaintiff resident at Toul, notwithstanding the fact that no



definite agreement as to matrimony had been entered into by me. As one engaged in the profession of arms, I do not regard it as appropriate that I should be regarded in a feminine light. My disinclination to attire myself in feminine apparel derives from this.

#### DEAR OLD PALS

1. The following passage contains some overworked words. Pick out these "dear old pals" and suggest alternatives.

The partaking of spirituous beverages was a contributory factor to the premature decease of Uncle George. When he was acquainted by his doctor with the possible outcome of this indulgence, his immediate reaction was favourable; he deemed it wise to terminate the habit. However, his mentality was such that whenever he encountered a concourse of his associates he felt it incumbent upon him to share their conviviality, with the inevitable result that he was soon rendered incapable of remembering his good resolution.

2. Is the passage (a) good writing?  
(b) passable writing?  
(c) bad writing?  
(d) very bad writing?
3. Would you say that the passage was specially written to introduce these overworked words, or that the writer used them without realising that they were overworked?

#### POLITE CONVERSATION

From sentences 6 to 10 choose appropriate replies to sentences 1 to 5.

1. He showed no emotion when he learned the truth.
2. I found him insincere, gushing, and generally nauseating.
3. Has he paid any attention to what the doctor told him about his heavy drinking?
4. Why do people always take offence whenever he asks them to do anything?
5. He vitiated his argument by making two statements that were obviously untrue.

6. He is as intemperate as ever.
7. He is a mendacious fellow.
8. He is a stoic.
9. He is always unctuous.
10. He is too peremptory.

## THE KNOCK-OUT

THIS is intended to finish the abstract nouns. Turn back to page 5, and read the passage from Milton's *Tractate of Education*. Milton is writing about an abstract subject—a theory of education—and he uses a device that all great writers frequently use when they deal with abstract subjects.

(a) What is the device?

(b) Why is it used?

(c) Does the answer to the last question provide another argument against using unnecessary abstract nouns?

## HEAVENLY TWINS

Can we write **THOUGH**

as **though**

it meant **ALTHOUGH**?

## CHAPTER X

### ANATOMY FOR AMATEURS OR SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Words are arranged in phrases, clauses and sentences.

A **PHRASE** does not contain a finite verb, and is used as an adjective or adverb. When we wish to express an idea for which we have no handy adjective or adverb, we improvise one; we say that "a man *in a black overcoat* (adjective) was standing *in the shade of a large tree* (adverb)." Earlier, we called these adjective equivalents and adverb equivalents.

A **CLAUSE** contains a finite verb, and is used inside a larger group of words as a noun, adjective or adverb. These too are noun equivalents, adjective equivalents or adverb equivalents. Usually, a relative or a conjunction shows that the following group of words, though containing a finite verb, is a clause; that is, it is only a part of a larger group. For example, "that" often introduces a noun clause:

He told us *that you were leaving tomorrow.*

Interrogatives, too, frequently signal a noun clause, as here:

He did not tell us *why you had left.*

Relatives commonly indicate adjective clauses, such as,

A tinker is a man *who mends pots and pans.*

Adverbs often bring in adverb clauses, thus:

They were tired *when they finished the work.*

The ground was muddy *where the snow had thawed.*

We should always prefer a clause to a phrase, because the former contains a finite verb. It is possible to rewrite the last five examples so as to remove the clauses, thus:

He told us of your intention to depart tomorrow.

He did not tell us the reason for your departure.

A tinker is a man engaged in mending pots and pans.

At the conclusion of the work they were tired.

The thawing of the snow had made the ground muddy in places.

These are all longer than the originals, ~~and unnecessary~~ - unwanted participles and abstract nouns.

The SENTENCE is the only group of words that alone, as an independent utterance. This does not a sentence conveys a complete piece of meaning. The

It was his life-long ambition, but he never achieves does not give the reader complete meaning, for nothing of "he" or "ambition." Most sentences have incompleteness, for it coaxes the reader to the next sentence.

The sentence is "complete" because it has a finite subject, this subject not being a relative pronoun. It must also be a statement or question or command, unfinished part of one of these, such as a supposition by "if," a reason introduced by "since," or a conclusion by "although." None of the following is although each has a finite verb and its subject:

Which is an important matter . . . (subject pronoun).

If, as you claim, the work can be finished in a

Since there are only three men available for which requires skilled craftsmen . . .

Sentences are not necessary to convey meaning, I do without them in conversation, in telegrams, and But in doing without them we often have to guess reading the headline "Boy carried off battleship" precisely its two meanings, and reject one as unlikely.

We also accept that certain expressions such as "certainly not" can stand alone, but generally we keep the normal sentence structure. When we say yesterday," we use "it" as a dummy subject, purely normal sentence pattern, for the meaning is complete yesterday," and it is hard to say what "it" refers to when we say, "So do we," we use "do" as a dummy

In prose we rigidly preserve the normal sentence mainly because this makes it easier for the reader to follow us. After he has read part of the sentence he recognizes the pattern that is being used, and his mind begins to anticipate the end of it before his eyes do. The conventional

also make prose briefer, and lessen the risk of ambiguous sentences.

In factual writing, a group of words that announces by its capital letter and full stop that it is intended as a sentence must contain an independent subject and a finite verb. The best safeguards are to think out each sentence before writing it, and to read over work carefully when it is finished.

A person who is too fond of participles may easily fail to write a complete sentence. He embarks on his sentence with a participle, follows it with two or three more, adds perhaps a clause and an infinitive or two, and then forgets that he has no main verb and puts a full stop. His so-called sentence reads something like this:

A dismal prospect extending as far as the eye can see, with only rocks and stunted trees dotting the ground, no attempt having been made to cultivate the ground, possibly because this could only have been done by introducing an elaborate irrigation scheme.

"Extending" must be changed to "extends" and the sentence will then be much improved by a full stop after "ground" and a fresh start, "No attempt had been made. . . ." The writer would not have got into trouble if he had not attempted so long a "sentence."

The words "for example" and "for instance" are also dangerous. The writer puts a full stop after his statement, begins his next sentence with "For example," and then forgets that he has started afresh. He writes something like this:

There is much to suggest that he was an entirely self-centred, unscrupulous and untrustworthy man. For example, his secret negotiations with the Opposition while allowing his colleagues to think that he was whole-heartedly supporting their policy.

Wherever possible, it is best to follow "for example," and "for instance," with a finite verb; "he secretly negotiated" would correct the last example. If this is not possible, one can write, "An example of this is. . . ."

The most natural way of making a sentence is to begin with the subject, to add the verb, and then to add the rest of the

sentence. As long as we keep to this natural order we do not often get into difficulties. In conversation we make short sentences of this type, and string them together mainly with "ands" and "buts." A sample of the style is:

The village seemed asleep, and he passed through it unseen.

He followed the main road, and presently he came to a narrow lane. It led up a steep hill.

This is clear and concise, and quite satisfactory if there are not too many "ands" and "buts." It may seem too simple, but it is better to be too simple than too complex, and a writer should never be afraid of writing like this if he gets into difficulties with his sentences, or if he has complicated matter to express.

The prose can be made more varied if some of the sentences are converted into clauses, thus:

He passed unseen through the village, which seemed to be asleep, and followed the main road until he came to a narrow lane which led up a steep hill.

There is now only one place, after "asleep," where the reader could stop and feel at all satisfied. "Which," "until," and "which" again, all tempt him to read on. The writer is creating suspense. He must be careful, however, never to sacrifice the accuracy, clarity and brevity of his writing in order to achieve this.

The highest development of this style is what is called the periodic construction, in which a sentence is so constructed that a reader cannot grasp its full meaning until he has read to the end, or almost the end, of it. Two devices are used. One is to push qualifying words, phrases or clauses in front of the main words or statements, thus:

Through the village, which seemed to be asleep, he passed unseen.

Everything seemed to be asleep as, unseen, he passed through the village.

This device not only creates suspense, but it often allows an important word—as "unseen" might be—to be put in a prominent position.

The other device is the use of conjunctions that work in pairs. We might have, for example:

He neither saw anyone as he passed through the village, nor was he seen by anyone.

Not only did he see nobody as he passed through the village, but nobody saw him.

The periodic construction can produce very varied and compressed sentences, but it is rather unnatural, and always difficult to do well. Ambiguous sentences, grammatical errors, and over-long and complicated sentences are likely to occur, and there is always the danger that a reader may be kept waiting for a statement that he finds not worth waiting for. The following sentence, for example, ends too flatly:

Held in the Town Hall on February 22nd, and attended by a large crowd of people, many of whom had travelled long distances and queued for hours, the concert was a great success.

This would be better arranged more simply, perhaps as follows:

The concert was held in the Town Hall on February 22nd, and was a great success. It attracted a large crowd of people, many of whom travelled long distances, and queued for hours outside.

A writer of factual prose should use only short and straightforward periodic sentences, and he should use them sparingly. There is also the balanced sentence, but that should be avoided in factual writing, for it is a rhetorical device and belongs to oratory and emotional prose. In a balanced sentence the same word patterns are repeated, to emphasise that the thoughts expressed are either similar or dissimilar. An example is:

"Death, which hateth and destroyeth man, is believed; God, which hath made and loves him, is always deferred."<sup>1</sup>

Balanced and periodic sentences are often awkward because they force the writer to upset the natural order of words.

To keep words in their natural order we must keep close together words that are closely related in meaning. We should avoid complications by making our sentences fairly short, and the writer of factual prose can hardly go too far in this direction. Even if his writing seems jerky, no one can sensibly criticise it if it is accurate and clear, for it will have achieved its aim, which is to state facts. Besides, short sentences do not themselves produce a jerky or childish effect as often as people suppose.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *A History of the World*.

The following is in short sentences, and it is crude:

The village is in a valley, and there is agricultural land all around it. The crops in most of the fields are corn and roots, but there are some pastures. The main road to London is a mile from the village, and there is a footpath to it.

We cannot make this perfect without altering the sentences, but we can very much improve it:

The village lies in a valley, and is surrounded by agricultural land. Corn and roots grow in most of the fields, but there are some pastures. The main road to London runs within a mile of the village, and is connected to it by a footpath.

The original was crude because the writer used no verb but "to be"—and this is a very common fault indeed. Short and simple sentences may be used freely, but the verb "to be" must not be over-worked.

There are two types of sentence that damage direct writing. One is the "afterthought sentence," in which the writer has roughly tacked to the end something he forgot to mention in its proper place. Typical "afterthought sentences" are:

The troops advanced in line, having first fixed bayonets.

If the machine is worked by hand instead of electricity, it makes no difference, except that the work takes longer.

These sentences upset the reader, especially when, as in the second example, the afterthought contradicts the main statement. They also insult the reader, for the writer has obviously not bothered to think out his sentence. The last two examples should have been expressed:

Having fixed bayonets, the troops advanced in line.

If the machine is worked by hand instead of by electricity the only difference is that the work takes longer.

The word that appears in many "afterthought sentences" is "also," used as a conjunction. A writer can avoid bad sentences if he resolves to use "also" strictly as an adverb, and in enumerations always to couple it with "and." The following examples show the correct use of "also":

He also was bad-tempered yesterday (i.e. he as well as someone else).



He was also bad-tempered yesterday (i.e. as well as worried).

He was bad-tempered yesterday also (i.e. as well as today).

He was bad-tempered and also worried.

He complained about the food, the service, and also the weather.

“Also” must never be used as a conjunction to drag in an afterthought, as it does in the following:

The country’s prosperity depends upon her mines, her textile industry, her steel foundries, also her agriculture.

The country’s prosperity depends upon her mines, her textile industry, and her steel foundries. Also, her agriculture is important.

When a sentence begins with the word “also” it is almost certain that “also” has been wrongly used as a conjunction, and the sentence is a bad one. The last two examples should be:

The country’s prosperity depends upon her mines, her textile industry, her steel foundries and her agriculture.

The country’s prosperity depends upon her mines, her textile industry, and her steel foundries. Her agriculture also is important.

The second dangerous type of sentence is the negative sentence. Firstly, negative sentences may be inaccurate. The sentence,

No visitors will be allowed to pay at the gates, but must purchase their tickets in advance,  
means that no visitors may purchase their tickets in advance, whereas the writer intended to say that all visitors must purchase their tickets in advance. He should have written:

All visitors must purchase their tickets in advance, as no one will be allowed to pay at the gates.

Secondly, negative statements are often hard to understand. Who, for example, could read the following without having to pause and work out what it means?

Had it not been for my evidence, the magistrates could not but have treated him as a wrongfully accused person.  
This is much simpler when it is put into a positive form:

After I had given evidence, the magistrates knew that the charges against him were well-founded.

Thirdly, negative statements are less exact than positive ones.

Unfortunately, we are tempted to use negatives freely because it is easier to say what a thing is not than to say what is is. If we read the sentence,

The men were not enthusiastic,  
we may ask ourselves, "What were they?" The words that would suggest themselves might be "lazy," "bored," "apathetic," "dull," "indifferent," and "disinterested." As readers, we cannot choose one of these, because they are all slightly different in meaning. But if, as he should have done, the writer had made the choice, he would have given us a more precise fact. This does not mean that we should never write such a sentence as, "The men were not enthusiastic." It means that we must be sure we are justified in doing so, and that we are not using the negative to avoid the trouble of finding a more precise expression.

Positive statements are worth the trouble, for they force the writer to work out his ideas clearly. A writer who says what a thing is not, leaving the reader to infer what it is, is shifting part of his work on to the reader, which is unfair, and which the reader resents. Furthermore, positive statements are shorter than negative ones. The statement,

The enemy's attacks were neither sustained nor continuous,  
is not only more precise but much shorter if made positive:

The enemy's attacks were desultory (intermittent, sporadic).

A writer often makes a complicated sentence because he is afraid of repeating a noun. But there is no harm in repeating a noun even three or four times, for the devices to avoid repetition are not easy to handle. "Former" and "latter" are useful, so long as they are near the words they refer to, and the reader does not have to pause to think what they mean. The following is sensible:

The Duke of Orleans and Philip of Burgundy were both struggling to obtain complete control of France. The former was supported by the nobles in the South, the latter by the people of Paris.

It is worth noting, however, that "former" and "latter" are not really necessary here, for the sentence could well have been:

Orleans was supported by the nobles in the South, and Burgundy by the people of Paris.

A stupid use of "former" and "latter" appears in the following:

The struggle was between the Duke of Orleans and Philip of Burgundy, an ambitious man who had been growing more and more aggressive ever since he had been granted his duchy after the battle of Poitiers. The former was supported by the nobles in the South, the latter by the people of Paris.

The spaces between "former" and "latter" and the words they refer to are now too long.

"Former" and "latter" should never be used unnecessarily. Further, they must never be used when more than two persons or things are mentioned. The following is wrong:

The struggle was between King Charles VI, the Duke of Orleans and the Duke of Burgundy. The latter was strongly supported by the people of Paris.

"The last," not "the latter," is required. Similarly, King Charles VI would have to be "the first," not "the former."

Of the other tricks to avoid repeating words, the form "he (Smith) told him (Jones)" is only an ugly way of repeating words, while "elegant variation" requires a genius to make it a success. "Elegant variation" occurs when a writer, say on Shakespeare, avoids repeating "Shakespeare" by calling him "the Bard of Avon," "the great Elizabethan," "the world dramatist," "our finest poet" and so on. A more subtle form of it is seen in the following:

Two examples were quoted. In the first instance the prisoner was convicted, but in the second case he was acquitted. Here the variations are unnecessary. "Instance" and "case" can be crossed out.

There is one more device for avoiding the repetition of words, and that is one that has caused countless bad sentences—the use of "respective" and "respectively." The proper use of these is to run together two sentences which have the same verb. Thus:

Lions live in Africa and tigers live in India  
can be written:

Lions and tigers live in Africa and India respectively.  
"Respectively" tells the reader to take "lions" with "Africa" and "tigers" with "India." The trick therefore only works with

sentences that are evenly balanced. It only makes confusion worse in sentences such as:

Lions and giraffes and tigers live in Africa and India respectively.

Lions and tigers live in Africa and India and Burma respectively.

A more common error, however, is to use "respective" or "respectively" quite unnecessarily, and as though they meant, vaguely, "own," or "proper" or "accustomed." In the following sentences "respective" does no useful work, and should be crossed out:

The boxers retired to their respective corners.

The guards took up their respective positions outside the palace.

We should write to our respective members of Parliament.

This use of "respective" and "respectively" is usually merely a piece of padding, but it can be confusing. For example, if twenty people retire to their respective sides of the room, it would appear that the room has twenty sides. "Respective" and "respectively" are words that are best left alone.

#### HAPPY COUPLES

Pick out the pairs of words that have roughly the same meaning.

bellicose    beneficial    celestial    clandestine    earthly  
 felicitous    happy    healthy    heavenly    impecunious  
 lively    mundane    poor    salubrious    salutary    secret  
 true    veracious    vivacious    warlike

#### CLAUSES—AND EFFECTS

Turn the italicised phrases into clauses. Are the sentences better with phrases or clauses?

1. The harvest was poor, *owing to an unusually wet summer.*
2. He mentioned *your having written to him about this.*
3. *Being very low-built,* the vehicle cannot be used on rough tracks.
4. We noticed *their ability to move silently through the forest.*
5. A person can claim income tax relief *in respect of having aged relatives to support.*

## TO BE AND NOT TO BE

Rewrite the following sentences, removing the verb "to be."

1. The business of a trader is the buying and selling of goods.
2. From the ferry there is a path leading to the woods.
3. There are no trains from this station before 7 o'clock.
4. In this type of house there are four bedrooms.
5. The aim of the company is to produce a cheap and reliable article.

## BLACK SHEEP FOR BLEACHING

Correct or improve the following sentences.

1. Some novels are written to expose social evils. For example, those of Charles Dickens.
2. The house was a gaunt edifice on the edge of the marshes; stunted trees afforded the building no shelter, and the bleak wind of the fens howled continuously through the lonely mansion.
3. If he makes an alteration on the document now, he will be guilty of forgery. Which is a serious crime, and one that he would not dare to commit.
4. He hoped he would still be able to help his partner, but was no longer confident that he could recover his (his partner's) money.
5. Six soldiers stepped forward, and on the word of command marched to their respective sides of the quadrangle.

## THE PERILS OF PARTICIPLES

Correct the following sentences. Wherever possible, replace the participles by finite verbs.

1. Due to its being situated on low ground, the house is damp in winter.
2. Looking to the South-East, a magnificent view of the Thames Valley can be obtained.
3. There have been complaints about long delays at booking offices, thus causing passengers to miss their trains.
4. Written in great haste, while the author was preoccupied with family troubles, there are many faults in the book.
5. Nowadays we have machines that carry men through the air, previously thought impossible.

## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Without altering the words more than you can help, break the following sentence into at least six sentences.

Let us go together up the more retired street, at the end of which we can see the pinnacles of one of the towers, and then through the low grey gateway, with its battlemented top and small latticed window in the centre, into the inner private-looking road or close, where nothing goes in but the carts of the tradesmen who supply the bishop and the chapter, and where there are little shaven grass-plots, fenced in by neat rails, before old-fashioned groups of somewhat diminutively and excessively trim houses, with little oriel and bay windows jutting out here and there, and deep wooden cornices and eaves painted cream colour and white, and small porches to their doors in the shape of cockle-shells, or little, crooked, thick, indescribable wooden gables warped a little on one side; and so forward till we come to larger houses, also old-fashioned, but of red brick, and with gardens behind them, and fruit walls, which show here and there, among the nectarines, the vestiges of an old cloister arch or shaft, and looking in front on the cathedral square itself, laid out in rigid divisions of smooth grass and gravel walk, yet not uncheerful, especially on the sunny side, where the canons' children are walking with their nurserymaids.<sup>1</sup>

## MISSING MIDDLES

Complete the words on the right, which mean roughly the same as those on the left.

approval	ap . . . . ation
excitement	ag . . ation
flattery	ad . . ation
satisfaction	gr . . . . . ation
humiliation	mo . . . . . ation
continuance	du . ation
seizure	co . . . . . ation
league	fe . . . ation
sacrifice	ob . ation
a thinning away	at . . . . ation
a connection	con . . . . . ation

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*.

## HEADLINE

"Fresh Herrings Plan to Defeat Slump."

1. Does this mean (a) Fresh herrings are planning to defeat the slump?
  - (b) Previous "herrings plans" having failed, someone has invented a fresh one?
  - (c) Someone plans to use fresh herrings to defeat a slump?
2. Is this (a) a good headline? (b) a good statement of fact?

## CHAPTER XI

### TELLING 'EM STRAIGHT OR DIRECT SENTENCES

For the writer who would go straight to the point here are three precepts:

Use as many finite verbs as you can.

Use as many transitive verbs as you can.

Use the active voice as much as you can.

Transitive verbs are direct because subject + verb + object is the shortest and clearest way we have of making a statement.

The active is better than the passive voice, for the latter requires more words, and encourages the use of abstract nouns and participles. We cannot, of course, do without it. It must be used when, as in the following sentences, it is difficult to say who or what performed the action:

He was injured in a street accident.

The factory was burned down.

The ship was wrecked in a gale.

Rome was not built in a day.

These articles are made in France.

The passive is also used when there is a special reason for not mentioning who or what performed the action. This reason may be ignorance, as in:

It has been said that, "All that glisters is not gold."

It may be tact, as in:

It was said earlier in the evening. . . .

There is, too, the conventional avoidance of "I" and "we" in certain kinds of writing, mostly formal writing. This forces one to use the passive frequently, and often makes direct writing very difficult. The convention must often be accepted, but only when it is really necessary; business letters, for example, could use "we" more often than they do.

These are really the only occasions when the passive is absolutely necessary. But it is often useful when the writer wishes



to emphasise what would be the object of the verb in an active construction, thus:

My son was decorated by the King.

This picture was painted by a student.

His presence of mind was admired by all.

The mistakes were first noticed by the auditors.

Sometimes, too, a practised writer can make a neater sentence by using the passive. In the following statement all the verbs are active:

He drove to the Town Hall, where a large crowd of people met him. They had been waiting for hours to catch a glimpse of him.

This can be made slightly more compact if we use the passive:

He drove to the Town Hall, where he was met by a large crowd of people who had been waiting for hours to catch a glimpse of him.

It is important to notice, however, that there is very little to choose between these two statements. The first is perfectly clear and straightforward. It is never worth damaging an accurate and clear statement in an attempt to gain a small advantage by using the passive voice. The passive voice should not be used unless there is a good reason for rejecting the active. We should ask ourselves, not, "Am I justified in making this passive?", but, "Is there a good reason why I should not make it active?"

The weaknesses of the passive voice are also present in impersonal constructions, that is, such expressions as "there has been . . .," "it will be . . .," and "it was announced by him that. . . ." These are often unnecessarily used. The sentence,

By four o'clock there were more than a hundred people watching the coastguards' efforts to rescue the men on the rocks,

becomes more direct when the impersonal construction is removed:

By four o'clock more than a hundred people were watching the coastguards' efforts to rescue the men on the rocks.

These impersonal constructions are at their worst when they are arranged as parentheses, that is, in the form:

This is, it must be remembered, a matter that affects each one of us personally.

This is a type of sentence that should be avoided. It should be rewritten:

Each one of us must remember that this is a matter that affects him personally.

Any parenthesis is an interruption, and should not be used if another convenient way of expressing the idea can be found. The most insidious parentheses are the small ones, such as "nevertheless," "however," "on the other hand," "to resume," and "in passing." These are useful, but we are tempted to use them too much, for they seem to make our words flow smoothly. But too many of them irritate the reader, so it is best to think twice about each one of them and if possible do without it.

Here are ten ways of stating the same facts:

1. The General planned an approach to the town by night, to be followed by a surprise attack.
2. The General's plan was that the defenders should be taken by surprise as a result of an approach to the town under cover of night.
3. It was the General's intention to take the defenders of the town by surprise by approaching at night.
4. The essence of the General's plan was surprise, which he hoped would be achieved by his approach to the town by night.
5. The General planned to approach the town by night and surprise the defenders.
6. An approach to the town by night would, the General planned, be advantageous in that the defenders would then be taken by surprise.
7. By approaching the town by night the General planned to gain the advantage of surprise over the defenders.
8. The General planned to achieve a surprise attack by means of a night-approach to the town.
9. With the aim of surprising the defenders, the General made plans for the town to be approached by night.
10. The General planned to approach the town by night, so that the defenders would be surprised by his unexpected appearance.

One of these sentences is more direct than any of the others.

It is No. 5—*The General planned to approach the town by night and surprise the defenders.* It has three transitive verbs, it is entirely in the active voice, and it keeps strictly to the order, subject + verb + object. It is the only sentence that does not contain an abstract noun, a participle, or a gerund. It is also the shortest sentence.

Some of the other sentences are passable, others are bad. No. 1 is a fair sentence, though weakened by the passive infinitive "to be followed" and by the abstract noun, "approach." No. 2 is a bad sentence; its worst faults are "was" as the main verb, the passive "should be taken," the pompous "as a result of," and the unnecessary abstraction, "under cover of."

No. 3 is an impersonal construction, which here leaves the writer with the clumsy "by surprise by approaching"—which is typical of the difficulties into which impersonal constructions lead us. No. 4 is bad; "essence" is an unnecessary abstract noun, and it was unwise to make the whole sentence depend upon another abstract noun, "surprise." The passive, "would be achieved by," is very awkward and quite unnecessary; "he hoped to achieve by approaching" would greatly improve the sentence.

No. 6 is another bad sentence, mainly because of "would be" as the main verb, and the parenthesis, "the General planned"; moreover, a sentence is very rarely direct if it contains "in that." No. 7 is passable, but there was no need to point out that surprise is an advantage; "planned to surprise the defenders" would make the sentence satisfactory. No. 8 is concise, but the writer would have done better if he had avoided "by means of" and "night-approach"; he could easily have written, "The General planned to approach the town by night and achieve a surprise attack."

In sentence No. 9 "aim" is an unnecessary abstract noun, and the passive, "town to be approached" is not only unnatural but also vague; the writer seems afraid to say who would approach the town. No. 10 is spoiled by the passive "would be surprised," which drags in the abstract noun "appearance"; and "unexpected" is unnecessary after "surprised."

Anyone who cared to could invent ten more ways of stating these facts. If he then arranged his ten sentences in order of merit he would find that the most direct were those that con-

tained transitive verbs in the active voice, and the least direct those that contained abstract nouns, participles, and adjectives.

Prose is never direct if it contains padding. Few people deliberately write padding; they do so because, while they can recognise padding in other people's work, they cannot recognise it in their own.

There are two kinds of padding, and they are usually inter-mixed. One is the dressing of thoughts in unnecessary words, often a form of "elegant variation." The writer of the following, for example, while not obviously repeating himself, spreads his meaning too thinly and introduces unnecessary details:

From the hundreds of offices housed in the tall buildings the seething crowds poured into the streets, men and women making their way towards the trains and buses that would carry them in their thousands away from the noise and bustle of the metropolis.

This is a crude attempt at emotional writing. As a statement of fact it could be expressed as:

Crowds of men and women emerged from the tall buildings and went towards the trains and buses that would carry them from the city.

The other form of padding is the needless repetition of facts. At its simplest, this appears in such expressions as "the reason is because," "the subject is about," "because of a variety of reasons," "the cause is attributed to" and "it has contained in it." At the next stage it is two sentences that say the same thing in different words:

A careful and conscientious check of these documents must be carried out. Every effort must be made to ensure that even the smallest error is discovered and corrected.

This simply means:

These documents must be carefully checked.

In instructional writing, in lectures and in lessons, repetition is deliberately and carefully inserted because the student must revise as he goes along. In ordinary writing, a person usually repeats himself because he wants to be emphatic or because he wants to make himself clear. But repetition does not make writing emphatic or clear. To cure himself of repetition, a writer

should think how he reacts when he is himself a reader. He will then realise that he only needs a fact to be stated once, clearly and concisely, in order to understand it, and that repetition makes him impatient.

We can best avoid padding if we understand what causes it. First, there is pomposity. The padding written by a man who is trying to make unimportant remarks seem important can easily be recognised by its abstract nouns, its "parrot cries," its "muddled thinker's best friends," its long words vaguely used, and its useless parentheses, such as "let it be noted," "it will readily be appreciated," and "though I say it myself." The pompous man nearly always drags in "as such." This is the sort of stuff he produces:

It would be a singular misfortune, not to say a disaster of the first magnitude, if at this portentous moment in our country's history the elected and responsible leaders of the people, acting as such, were to throw into jeopardy that recovery towards which the nation has striven unremittingly, and, it may be added, not without a considerable measure of success.

We must keep in mind the old-fashioned alderman who, when he rose to speak, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. We must never let our thumbs move towards our waistcoats.

A second cause of padding, and one that is more excusable, is timidity. The writer is afraid to commit himself, so he waters everything down. People never "do" anything; they "tend to do" it. Black is never black, nor white white. Black, is "somewhat black," "rather black," "to a certain extent black," or "not un-white." White is "generally white," "perhaps white," "often considered white," or "in most cases white."

This kind of padding is pointless. It does not disguise a fact that is wrong, and it weakens a fact that is right, so the writer loses whether he is right or wrong. Suppose someone had written:

A furlong is one-third of a mile.

That statement is wrong. It is still wrong, and we will deceive no one into thinking it right, if we express it as:

A furlong is about one-third of a mile.

We usually tend to regard a furlong as about one-third of a mile.

It can be said that, generally speaking, a furlong is one-third of a mile.

It is usually agreed that a furlong is one-third of a mile.

Suppose, on the other hand, someone had written:

A furlong is one-eighth of a mile.

That statement is true, and there can be no argument. If we write it as,

A furlong is about one-eighth of a mile,  
the statement is wrong. If we write,

It can be said that, generally speaking, a furlong is one-eighth of a mile,  
the statement is correct, but it is not confident or forceful.

The words that most attract addicts to this timid style are "somewhat" and "rather," which they use to dilute strong words. If one chooses a strong word, such as "shameful," "magnificent," "outrageous" or "immense," it is wasted if one then dilutes it with "rather" or "somewhat"; it would have been better to have chosen a weaker word and not qualified it.

Padding also occurs when a writer, perhaps unconsciously, is trying to avoid having to think hard. A business man may have to write a letter to a customer, stating four facts:

1. We have received your letter.
2. We did not send the goods, as we promised, on July 1st.
3. We are sorry.
4. We have sent them today.

He may write something like this:

We thank you for your letter of July 2nd. We very much regret that we could not deliver the goods, as we agreed to do, on July 1st, but we have despatched them today.

We assure you that the delay was unavoidable, and we promise that any future orders will reach you on the agreed day.

Reading this over, he may decide that it is too curt. If curtness is undesirable, he must remove it by adding more facts. But this requires careful thought. Can he explain the cause of the delay? What can he say to convince the customer that this will not happen again? Is there anything he can say to attract further

orders? By answering such questions as these he would produce a longer letter that would be direct and convincing. Unfortunately, he shies from this labour, and tries to remove the curtness, not by adding *facts*, but by adding *words*. The result is padding:

We are in receipt of your letter of July 2nd, for which we thank you. As you point out, it was agreed between us that the goods to which you refer in the above-mentioned letter should be delivered on July 1st, and we ask you to accept our most sincere apologies for our failure to do so. You will be pleased to learn, however, that they are already in transit to you, having been despatched today, and it is anticipated that they should reach you by tomorrow at the very latest.

It will be appreciated that the delay in this matter is a most unusual occurrence with us, and was occasioned by circumstances entirely beyond our control, and we ask you to accept our assurances that the utmost endeavours will be made on all future occasions to ensure the prompt delivery on the agreed date of any orders with which you may favour us.

We very much regret any inconvenience that may have been occasioned to you by this entirely unforeseen delay, and assure you of our willingness to be of service to you in the future.

Apart from the misuse of "anticipated" for "expected," this is not a really bad specimen. The real degenerates are in so-called "business English," and begin, "We are in receipt of your esteemed favour of the 2nd inst., and we thank you for the same." But the letter is inefficient, for it is neither clear nor sincere.

A fourth cause of padding is a writer's search for introductions and conclusions, which some people think they need for every paragraph. Introductions and conclusions arise naturally when facts are well arranged; they are only the facts that logically come first and the facts that logically come last. If a writer plans his work well he does not have to keep telling the reader what has just happened and what is going to happen next. But when a writer arranges his facts badly, the reader is violently wrenched from one topic to another; the writer sometimes notices this, but instead of applying the proper remedy,

which is to re-arrange the facts, he inserts rows of almost meaningless words between his various topics. These he calls "introductions" and "conclusions," and hopes that they will act as buffers between his ill-arranged facts. They are padding.

If a writer makes his prose accurate, clear and brief, he need not worry about "style," for that will automatically follow. He need only ensure that his words are appropriate to his subject-matter. In formal writing he should not use contractions such as "didn't" and "won't" and "we'll," or archaic or slang words. He will have to think more carefully about idiom. "Idiom" is used with several meanings, but here it means expressions which break the rules of grammar or defy common sense, but which have clear meanings which are sanctioned by usage. Such expressions first appear in slang or in homely speech; eventually they either disappear or become an accepted part of the language. The difficulty is to know which idioms have become quite respectable. "To fight shy," "all day long," "a red herring," "time and again," "to peter out," and "the livelong day" are accepted in all but very formal writing; "to go one better" and "to cut it fine" seem to be slightly less respectable, while "a good bit" and "a lot of" are definitely frowned on. A writer must weigh the respectability of an idiom against the formality of his writing. He should not, as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers did, eschew anything that smacks of idiom. If he does, his prose may be stiff and lifeless.

#### A VISIT TO THE DISSECTING ROOM

Above the entrance to the Dissecting Room is inscribed the following couplet, which all visitors are required to learn by heart:

Words are like leaves: and where they most abound  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.<sup>1</sup>

Having got that word-perfect, let us go to the dissecting table and inspect Specimen A. It is a passage quoted by Sir Ernest Gowers in his book *Plain Words*:

<sup>1</sup> Pope, *Essay on Criticism*.



If he was not insured on reaching the age of 65 he does not become insured by reason of any insurable employment which he takes up later, and the special contributions which are payable under the Act by his employer only, in respect of such employment, do not give him any title to health insurance benefits or pension, and moreover a man is not at liberty to pay any contributions on his own account as a voluntary contributor for any period after his 65th birthday. Specimen B is a better version of the same statement:

A man who is not insured before he is 65 cannot afterwards become insured. If he takes a job in which a younger man would be insured he cannot pay insurance contributions, even if he wishes to. His employer must pay special contributions, but these do not entitle the man to health insurance benefits or a pension.

In Specimen A we find:

- 10 abstract nouns—*age, 65, reason, employment, respect, employment, title, liberty, account, period.*
- 9 other nouns (several of which might be called abstract)—*contributions, Act, employer, benefits, pension, man, contributions, contributor, birthday.*
- 3 infinite verbs—*reaching, insured, to pay.*
- 6 finite verbs—*was insured, does become, takes up, are, do give, is.*
- 14 adjectives—*insurable, special, payable, his, such, any, health-insurance, any, his, own, voluntary, his, any, 65th.*

In Specimen B we find:

- 1 abstract noun—*job.*
  - 8 other nouns—*man, man, contributions, employer, contributions, man, benefits, pension.*
  - 1 infinite verb—*insured.*
  - 8 finite verbs—*is insured, cannot become, takes, would be insured, cannot pay, wishes, must pay, do entitle.*
  - 6 adjectives—*65, younger, insurance, his, special, health-insurance.*
- Arranging these on the dissecting table, we see:

	A	B
Total words	85	57
Abstract nouns	10	1
Other nouns	9	8

	A	B
Infinite verbs	3	1
Finite verbs—total	6	8
transitive	2	3
active	5	6
Adjectives	14	6

We can then work out that in Specimen B we have:

Abstract nouns	85 per cent decrease
Other nouns	32 per cent increase
Infinitive verbs	49 per cent decrease
Finite verbs, total	100 per cent increase
Transitive	121 per cent increase
Active	78 per cent increase
Adjectives	36 per cent decrease

This dissection of good and bad factual prose gives the same results whatever the subject-matter of the writing may be. Specimen C is by James Anthony Froude.<sup>1</sup>

The sun was still above the horizon, and Drake meant to wait till night, when the breeze would be off the shore, as in the tropics it always is.

The *Pelican* sailed two feet to the *Cacafuego's* one. Drake filled his empty wine-skins with water and trailed them astern to stop his way. The chase supposed that she was followed by some heavy-loaded trader, and, wishing for company on a lonely voyage, she slackened sail and waited for him to come up.

Specimen D is the same incident described in something like the style of Specimen A.

It was the intention of Drake to take no active steps towards the furtherance of his design until the onset of night, in the confident expectation that at that time the wind would be from the direction of the shore, this phenomenon being an invariable characteristic of tropical climates.

In view of the fact that the rate of progress of the *Pelican* was considerably in excess of that of the *Cacafuego*, the commander of the former was forced to achieve a reduction of speed by the expedient of causing leather receptacles filled with water to be trailed in the rear of his ship. As a result, the impression was created aboard the vessel under pursuit of the following ship's being one designed for com-

<sup>1</sup> *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century*.

mercial purposes and at that moment laden to the utmost of its capacity. The Spaniards, being desirous of company on a lonely voyage, thereupon reduced their spread of sail, with the object of proceeding sufficiently slowly as to allow the following vessel to arrive within their immediate vicinity.

Anyone who cannot recognise which is the better prose should dissect Specimens C and D. As a quick test, he can count the abstract nouns in each of them. And is it not written in the Bible, "Let thy words be few"?<sup>1</sup>

#### MISLEADING LITTLE LIKENESSES

Distinguish between:

accessary	—	accessory	dependant	—	dependent
efficient	—	efficacious	eminent	—	imminent
imperative	—	imperious	simulate	—	dissimulate
		vocation	—		avocation

#### CLEARING OUT THE RUBBISH

Rewrite the following sentences more directly. *Use* finite verbs, transitive verbs, and the active voice. *Remove* abstract nouns, impersonal constructions, afterthoughts, and unnecessary negatives.

1. A disaster of a very serious nature was averted by the presence of mind of the policeman.
2. The use of the car park is not permitted to persons other than members of the club.
3. The standard was hoisted, and prayers were read by the chaplain, the band having previously taken up its position behind the flagstaff.
4. It will be appreciated by anyone who has lived in the East that punctuality is not as important as we suppose.
5. The agenda for the meeting will be made the subject of an announcement at a later date.
6. No one can fail to admire the not inconsiderable amount of progress which has already been made by the society.
7. Advice as to their legal position should be sought by tenants from their own solicitors.

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastes* v, 2.

8. It cannot be doubted but that the crime was committed by the accused as the result of a deliberate plan.
9. It must not be forgotten that there was serious disagreement among ourselves over this matter.
10. The farmers were facing ruin through drought and labour troubles; also, there had been outbreaks of cattle disease *earlier in the year*.
11. Further action in connection with increasing our deliveries cannot be undertaken by us until the present shortages give way to normal conditions as regards supplies and prices.
12. He was the first man to attempt this research, except for some minor experiments by French scientists in the nineteenth century.
13. Were it not for the fact that he had received several large sums of money from the plaintiff there could be no reason to suppose that he was prompted by other than friendly motives.
14. World-wide economic disequilibrium of a far-reaching character can be brought about by the reluctance of wealthy creditor nations to invest capital outside their own areas.
15. The fact that it was the playwright's intention to satirise our system of government was not fully grasped by the audience.

## -ATE TO ABBREVIATE

Replace the words in italics by the single words indicated in the brackets.

1. His speech *infused liveliness into* the discussion. (A...ATED)
2. War was inevitable when Germany *acted in direct opposition to the terms of* the treaty. (V...ATED)
3. The moisture had *diffused itself through* several layers of the cloth. (P....ATED)
4. For some years he *exercised an unchallenged influence over* English writers. (D....ATED)
5. We suspect that he has *wrongly taken for his own use* the funds that were entrusted to him. (M.....ATED)
6. When the leading vehicle struck the barrier it was *flung violently headlong into* the ditch. (P.....ATED)
7. His ambition was that the people should be *freed from the restraints under which they were suffering*. (E.....ATED)

8. Time and the weather had *so destroyed* the lettering on the tombstone *that no clear traces of it remained*. (O . . . . . ATED)
9. The drug did not cure the disease, but it *reduced the severity of* the pain. (A . . . . . ATED)
10. After many years' work scientists have *completely got rid of* the disease in this part of the world.  
(ER . . . . . ATED, EX . . . . . ATED)

## BY THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE

Arrange the following in order of merit as statements of fact.

1. We travelled very fast on the return journey.
2. Our speed was exceedingly high on the return journey.
3. We came back very fast.
4. We didn't half go coming back.

## CHAPTER XII

### SUITABLE STOPPING-PLACES OR SOME NOTES ON PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is used for two purposes, to make clear the grammatical structure of a sentence, and to emphasise meaning. We have to pause very slightly over the following sentences:

The barn being built of wood burned fiercely.

He said that he would resign and that was what he did.

Punctuation reveals the structure of each sentence, and we can read it without hesitation:

The barn, being built of wood, burned fiercely.

He said that he would resign, and that was what he did.

The meanings of sentences, too, can change with the punctuation, as they do in the following examples:

You are ready now.

You are ready now?

He said he was ready.

He said, "He was ready."

When a writer is in doubt about his punctuation, it will often help him if he decides whether he needs a stop to make his structure clear, or to emphasise his meaning. But he must not use punctuation to patch a sentence that is structurally weak. Slack writers do this when their words are badly arranged, and it is rarely a success. In such a sentence as,

He was seen by a policeman riding a bicycle,  
to put a comma after "policeman" is no remedy. A new sentence is needed, for example:

A policeman saw him riding a bicycle.

We use the COMMA when we enumerate, bracket or separate. The first of these is simple, but mistakes sometimes occur because a person thinks he is always safe if he follows the punctuation shown in:

He supplied bread, butter, milk and cheese.

This is nearly always correct, but it is useless in a poorly constructed sentence, such as:

Tribute was paid to the sailors, airmen, soldiers and men who had worked in the factories.

A comma after "soldiers" would just save this sentence, though it would be better to alter it to . . . "and soldiers, and to the men. . . ." A writer should never be afraid to use the full punctuation in these enumerative sentences, that is:

He supplied bread, butter, milk, and cheese.

Pairs of commas are used to enclose qualifying words and statements, and here again there is danger in a supposed rule—that of enclosing within commas such expressions as "however," "perhaps," "of course," "on the other hand," "nevertheless" and "on the contrary." There is no rule. Either of the following is a sensible sentence:

He is now living in London, perhaps with his brother.

He is now living in London perhaps, with his brother.

The words do not make sense when punctuated:

He is now living in London, perhaps, with his brother.

We can often do without the commas around these expressions, but we should be careful not to omit them when an adjective or adverb follows "however":

It is, however, simple enough for most people.

If there were no commas in the above sentence, the reader might suppose that "however" qualified "simple," as it does in, "however simple this may seem to you. . . ." The reader is badly jolted when he finds he is on the wrong track.

When we use a single comma as a separator we must be careful how we divide the sentence. The following is wrong:

What we have just heard, proves you were right.

The comma must be removed, for the writer has divided his subject from its verb by a single comma, which he should never do. This mistake is usually made when the subject of the sentence is a long clause. The comma in the following sentence is wrong; the sentence can have no internal punctuation:

He announced that the gentleman whom the committee had selected for the position, had declined the offer.

It is also wrong to put a single comma between a transitive verb and its object. In the following sentence, the writer felt that

he must somehow divide the list of nouns he had carelessly thrown together, but he made matters worse by inserting a comma:

He greeted with the same courtesy, kings, lords, priests and commoners.

This sentence must be re-arranged:

He greeted kings, lords, priests and commoners with the same courtesy.

The worst and most common mistake with the comma, however, is that of using it to separate two independent clauses, that is, clauses that could stand alone as separate sentences. The comma in the following is not strong enough:

His long residence in the hotel had given him a peculiar position, he was a sort of unofficial host to the ordinary visitors.

Two independent clauses can be separated by a full stop, a semicolon or a colon, but not by a comma. Alternatively, they can be linked by a conjunction; here, for example, one could write "... position, and he was ..." We can write:

The way was steep and dusty. The sun shone pitilessly, *or*

The way was steep and dusty; the sun shone pitilessly, *or*

The way was steep and dusty, and the sun shone pitilessly.

We cannot write:

The way was steep and dusty, the sun shone pitilessly.

The colon would not be suitable here, for the independent clauses separated by the colon, which will be mentioned later, are rather special ones.

The comma can, however, separate independent clauses when more than two are piled up in a sentence, for then we are enumerating, not separating. We can write:

The way was steep and dusty, the sun shone pitilessly, and the travellers were tired.

The SEMICOLON always separates independent clauses. A writer may wish to keep two or more independent clauses in one sentence to show that they are all part of one idea, but the clauses may be too long or too many for him to separate by commas or link by conjunctions. Then the semicolon comes



to the rescue. The following, for example, is perfectly good writing:

The road runs through country that is wild, inhabited by unfriendly savages, and infested with wild beasts. There are no towns, or even villages. Food is difficult to obtain, and water is scarce for most of the year.

An experienced writer might wish to make one sentence of all this. He would use semicolons, thus:

The road runs through country that is wild, inhabited by unfriendly savages, and infested with wild beasts; there are no towns, or even villages; food is difficult to obtain, and water is scarce for most of the year.

There is a simple way of testing whether a semicolon is correctly used. If the clauses on either side of the semicolon are read separately, each should be able to stand alone, as an independent sentence. If one or both of them will not stand alone, the semicolon is wrong; probably a comma is needed.

The semicolon is useful for removing participles, especially present participles, and replacing them by finite verbs.

The ripe fruit is picked and despatched to the factory, where it is immediately sorted and graded, this being done by specially trained workers.

This sentence is much improved if a semicolon is used:

The ripe fruit is picked and despatched to the factory, where it is immediately sorted and graded; this is done by specially trained workers.

The semicolon is also invaluable in reported speech, used as it is in the following sentence:

The chairman said that the factory would have to be reorganised; if this were not done, the firm would be unable to compete with its better equipped rivals.

Here the semicolon divides what were two sentences in the chairman's speech, and also informs the reader that he is still reading what the chairman said. If a full stop had been used, the writer would probably have had to begin his next sentence with something like, "He went on to say. . . ."

The COLON is nowadays used mainly as an "introductory" stop, that is, one that indicates to the reader that a certain idea

or construction is to follow. This may be a reason or an explanation. The sentence,

The grooms have to go about their work quietly, for any sudden noise startles the horses,  
can be arranged as:

The grooms have to go about their work quietly: any sudden noise startles the horses.

In these sentences the colon replaces such conjunctions as "for," "because," "since" and "as."

The colon can also introduce a direct question that is not a quotation, for example:

This is the problem we have to settle: is the expense justified?

Further, the colon may bring in a clause that expresses an idea opposed to that in the preceding clause, as here:

In winter the place is deserted: in summer it is crowded.

The colon can only be used in this way, however, when each of the two clauses has the same grammatical shape. We could not write:

In winter the place is deserted: it is a favourite resort of summer visitors.

We would have to join the clauses by "but," or write:

In winter the place is deserted. It is, however, a favourite resort of summer visitors.

Most commonly, however, we find a colon in front of a list or a quotation, and it is here that we find most difficulty in deciding how to use it. Either alone, or with a dash (:—), the colon is used in front of a list when we are writing notes or tabulating our statements, thus:

Please send the following goods: (or:—)

2 doz. pencils

5 quires typing paper

1 packet carbon paper.

But we are more concerned with continuous prose, and in this we do not need a colon in front of every list. Each of the following is correctly punctuated:

There are three sorts of iron: pig iron, wrought iron, and cast iron. The three sorts of iron are pig iron, wrought iron, and cast iron.

We could not use any other stop but the colon in the first example, nor could we do without a stop; and it would be stupid

to put a stop after "are" in the second example. Since the colon is a heavy stop—something between a full stop and a semicolon—it is only used in front of a list when the introductory words form a complete statement. "There are three sorts of iron" is complete, but "The three sorts of iron are" is not complete. We can exemplify this principle by writing the same list in three ways:

The country produces mainly wheat, fruit, sugar, and cattle.

The main products of the country are wheat, fruit, sugar, and cattle.

The main products of the country are as follows: wheat, fruit, sugar, and cattle.

The same principle applies when we wish to introduce a quotation. If we can build the quotation neatly into the introductory sentence, as is done in modern novels, only a comma is needed, thus:

He said, "I am ready."

He came downstairs, saying, "I am ready."

His answer was, "I am ready."

We cannot always dovetail the quotation neatly into the introductory words when the latter is a complete statement, for there may be too marked a break between the introduction and the quotation. We then mark this break with a colon, thus:

This was what he found written on the paper: "Your life is in danger."

Someone had pasted a large placard on the wall: "Down with the Government."

The extra weight of the colon as a stop has the effect of bringing into prominence the quotation that follows. The above principle is therefore sometimes disregarded when the writer wishes to lay particular emphasis upon his quotation. He will use a colon, for example, if he wishes to make a long quotation, and to make his own remarks unobtrusive. If he wished to report, without comment, a large part of a speech by a celebrated person, he might write:

Speaking in London yesterday, Mr. X. said:

Or occasionally a writer may use the colon to emphasise even a short quotation, as here:

The actual words he used were: "I have lost the money."

The headline was: "Danger of War."

The danger with the QUESTION MARK is of forgetting it altogether. The following is a simple question, and we are unlikely to forget the question mark:

Would anyone believe that he could have been deceived by a confidence trick?

We may forget it, however, if the question is obscured by a long qualifying statement, or several qualifying statements, as here:

Would anyone believe that a man of his experience could have been deceived by one of the oldest confidence tricks in the world, one which has been described many times in the Press, and which is based on a most improbable story?

The question mark may also be forgotten because the writer has failed to recognise a question. Requests framed as questions are traps. These require question marks, as here:

May we call your attention to a new line of goods we are offering?

Will you please let us have your answer tomorrow?

Could you please tell me who is the owner of the land adjoining your property?

Direct and indirect questions are occasionally confusing.

Who came in first?

is a direct question. It becomes an indirect question in the following sentences:

Who came in first has not yet been decided.

I do not know who came in first.

An indirect question is a group of words that forms a question, but which is used as a noun clause, usually as the subject or object of a verb. Indirect questions do not require question marks. The main sentence may, of course, be itself a question and need its own question mark, as here:

Do you know who came in first?

The DASH is much abused, for some writers use it whenever they do not know, or cannot be bothered to think what the correct stop is. The proper uses of the dash are therefore worth learning.

Firstly, pairs of dashes are used, like brackets, to mark parentheses, for example:

The economic problems are clearly explained—though at times the author over-simplifies them—for the benefit of the novice.

Whenever we mark a parenthesis by brackets we should, after the second bracket, insert any punctuation mark that would be there if the parenthesis were removed. For example, we need a comma in the following sentence:

The author deals with economic problems, and he explains very clearly how important they are.

If we insert a parenthesis, we must not forget this comma. We must write:

The author deals with economic problems (which he sometimes over-simplifies), and he explains very clearly how important they are.

The single dash is used to gather up a sentence and add something to it. It may bring in a summary or a further description of what has gone before, for example:

He had travelled in Europe, America, China, Japan, India, Africa, Australia—everywhere.

Ahead was a dark mass of rocks half hidden by clouds—the foothills of the Andes.

The dash may also bring in a correction, as follows:

He now realised that he had spent all his money—or rather, his employer's money.

Because it has the effect of gathering up a sentence, the dash is used when a sentence is sprawling. The huge subject of the following sentence must be summarised before the reader can face the verb:

An intellect well above the average, an unflagging industry, a great tenacity of purpose, unshakable honesty and a fierce hatred of oppression—these qualities made him the greatest man of his age.

In the next sentence it is the object which is sprawling; the sentence must be pulled together before the reader can go on:

When we read of his great intellect, his unflagging industry, his tenacity of purpose, his unshakable honesty and fierce hatred of oppression—then we know why he has been called the greatest man of his age.

The dash may also indicate that the writer is deliberately leaving a sentence unfinished, for example:

When you consider what is happening elsewhere—but we have enough to do with our own problems just now.

Finally, the dash can be used to emphasise that a sentence is about to conclude with a joke, a climax, or an anti-climax:

“... And whispering, ‘I will ne’er consent,’—consented.”<sup>1</sup>

It will be noticed that the single dash is mainly required in rhetorical sentences. The factual writer should not often need it. Likewise, the EXCLAMATION MARK should be little used in factual prose. There are, moreover, three tricks with it that should be shunned. It should not be doubled or trebled (!!!) as a mark of emphasis; it should not be used to show that the writer has made a roguish remark; and it should not be used to indicate incredulity, as in:

He asked ten pounds for it!

QUOTATION MARKS should not cause difficulties provided one remembers that everything quoted goes inside them. It is common to find,

An article appeared in “The Times” yesterday,  
wrongly punctuated as,

An article appeared in the “Times” yesterday.

To decide whether or not a final punctuation mark goes inside the quotation marks one must look at the structure of the sentence. In the sentence,

I heard him say, “Who’s there?”  
the question mark is inside, since it belongs to the quotation. In the sentence,

Did you hear him say, “Come in”?  
it is outside, since the whole sentence is a question. We can summarise the usual practice as follows:

A statement concluding with a quoted word or quoted words ends—”.

e.g. The book he chose was “Pickwick Papers”.

<sup>1</sup> Byron.

A statement concluding with a quoted sentence ends—.”  
e.g. He said, “The rain has stopped.”

A statement concluding with a quoted question ends—?”  
e.g. He asked, “Has the rain stopped?”

A statement concluding with a quoted exclamation ends—!”  
e.g. He said, “How we laughed!”

A question concluding with a quoted sentence, or quoted words, ends—?”?  
e.g. Did he say, “The rain has stopped”?

A question concluding with a quoted question ends—?”?”?  
e.g. Did he ask, “Has the rain stopped?”?”

An exclamation containing a quoted sentence or quoted words ends—!”!  
e.g. How we laughed over “Pickwick Papers”!

Quotation marks should always enclose the titles of books, films, musical compositions, and so on (unless italics are used), for it is very annoying for the reader to have to keep wondering whether the writer is referring to “Macbeth” the play, or Macbeth the character in the play. Where a quotation is made inside a quotation, single quotation marks are used for the inner quotation, thus:

He said, “I think ‘Macbeth’ is Shakespeare’s best play.”

The rules for the **HYPHEN** are complicated, and writers do not agree very closely about them. Almost every sentence has to be judged separately, according to common sense, and a prudent writer often evades the hyphen problem by re-arranging his words. Some people might write:

a backward-children’s class.

But most of us would prefer:

a class for backward children.

Two words may be hyphenated to show that together they have a meaning different from that given by the two words used separately. Thus a “red-brick villa” is not a “red, brick villa,” which might be one built of yellow bricks and then painted red. A “dark-green coat” is not a “dark, green coat,” and a “thick-set man” is not a “thick, set man.”

Two words may be hyphenated when we wish to use them as a single adjective, thus:

A member of the working class usually lives in a working-class neighbourhood.

This is necessary if we wish to make our adjective by adding 's or s'. For example, we have a noun and an adjective in,

He was tried by *court martial*.

We have an adjective in,

He was detailed for *court-martial* duty,

and we also have an adjective in,

The *court-martial's* verdict was "Guilty."

\* \* \* \*

#### FAMILIAR CITIES

The City of Want is *Scarcity*. Find the cities of:

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. fierceness.    | 6. holding fast.    |
| 2. speed.         | 7. quarrelsomeness. |
| 3. plainness.     | 8. deceit.          |
| 4. greed.         | 9. daring.          |
| 5. talkativeness. | 10. wisdom.         |

#### REQUEST PROGRAMME

Punctuate:

1. Would you please inform us if there is any possibility of finishing the work this week
2. Please inform us if there is any possibility of finishing the work this week
3. Please inform us is there any possibility of finishing the work this week

#### ETIQUETTE HINT

When is it correct to write the following?

I beg your pardon.

I beg your pardon?

#### MARK THE DIFFERENCE

Punctuate the following to form (a) a command (b) a question.

Tell me who came in first



## HERE YOU STOP

Punctuate:

1. The house had been unoccupied for years it was in a deplorable condition
2. The judge having finished his summing up the jury retired
3. I thought to myself how can I possibly escape from here
4. Their clothes are made from a woollen cloth which they spin weave and dye in their cottages
5. When they opened the box they found in it a packet of papers wrapped in oilskin tied and heavily sealed it was coated with dust and had obviously lain undisturbed for years
6. They had to approach the buffaloes cautiously these animals charge at sight
7. The building is completely fire proof now that fire proof doors have been fitted
8. To have faced these dangers alone in a strange place and in complete darkness would have required great courage and the watchmans nerves steady though they usually were had already been severely strained
9. A land of merciless cold cut off from the refinements of civilisation peopled by lawless men and ruled by the gun that is the setting for the drama
10. Did the prisoner actually use the words I'll be revenged on him

## POET'S CORNER

A nineteenth-century barber is said to have displayed outside his shop:

WHAT DO YOU THINK  
I SHAVES FOR A PENNY  
AND ASKS YOU TO DRINK

Punctuate this to show (a) how he hoped passers-by would read it; (b) how he would read it to anyone who asked for a drink.

## "HOW FORCIBLE ARE RIGHT WORDS"

Complete the words in brackets, which will replace the words in italics.

1. The movements of the animals were just *loud enough to be detected by anyone listening carefully.* (A . . . IBLE)
2. Although not grammatically correct, his speech was *clear enough for everyone to understand what he meant.* (C . . . . . IBLE)
3. His were *the sort of excuses that seemed reasonable and probable.* (P . . . IBLE)
4. Every single one of the officials was *liable to be influenced by bribery.* (C . . . . . IBLE)
5. His contribution was *wretched enough to make everyone despise it.* (C . . . . . IBLE)
6. His solution seems to be one that *fits the facts and is quite practicable.* (F . . . IBLE)
7. His arguments were *so strong that no one could possibly dispute them.* (INC . . . . . IBLE)
8. Their conduct was *such that someone ought to have rebuked them for it.* (R . . . . . IBLE)
9. His subject is so remote from ordinary experience that at times his meaning is not readily *able to be grasped by the mind of an ordinary person.* (A . . . . . IBLE)
10. The people have certain rights *that cannot in any circumstances be done away with.* (IND . . . . . IBLE)

## EMBARRASSING MOMENT

Is there a hyphen missing here?

The school now employs a vice games mistress.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ACCORDING TO PLAN

#### OR MARSHALLING THE MATERIAL

*Who is going to read this?*

This is the first question a writer must answer. Before he begins to think about his subject he must think about his reader. He must form a clear idea of the person he will be addressing, whether this is an individual, or one of a group of persons, or one of a general class of persons. If he does not do this, his work will lack purpose. Fortunately, once a writer has visualised his reader, he can easily keep him in mind while he is writing, without being aware that he is doing so.

Having mentally called his reader to sit beside him, the writer may then think about his subject-matter, and he will find that he has five jobs—he must collect, select, arrange, express and revise. A skilled writer does these five jobs even when he produces the shortest paragraph; he may do some or all of them in his head, but he does them all.

A writer must first collect all his own thoughts on the subject before him, and he will do this best by jotting down all the ideas that come to him, in any order and in any words. As his notes grow he can think of questions arising from them, and note the answers; or, if answers cannot be found, he can write down the questions and consider them later. When his ideas have dried up, he should re-read his notes. New ideas will come, and he may be able to repeat this process two or three times before he finally runs dry. While he is working in this way, he will usually see a pattern emerging, a logical arrangement for the ideas that came at random. He should make a note of this, and list any points upon which he needs more information. Finding this information will give him a chance to put away his notes for a while, and he will find when he returns to them that he has new ideas, and that some of the problems of arrangement have disappeared; his subconscious mind has been at work.

The writer must now convince himself that his notes contain irrelevant matter. At first he will probably not believe that he has anything irrelevant, for we always dislike rejecting material. But at this stage there always is material to be rejected. The piece of writing must be narrowed to one topic, and aimed at one definite conclusion. There must also be sufficient facts to give the work substance; it may of course contain opinions, suggestions, conjectures, suppositions and theories, but these should rest on a strong foundation of facts. The first collection of material should therefore contain far more facts than the writer will need. This will enable him to pick and choose, and to reject anything that is obvious or irrelevant.

The selected material now has to be arranged, and the writer must jot down the headings that have emerged from his notes. Under them he should put sub-headings and notes. The sub-headings are very important, for neglect of them causes much bad writing. If two or three sub-headings cannot be found for a heading, something is wrong. Either more material must be found, or—what is more likely—the heading is not worthy to be a heading; it is either a sub-heading or just a fact that should be entered under a sub-heading.

The arranging of the material should not be scamped, in spite of the temptation to start writing. The time spent on this job will be recovered later, for the more sensibly facts are arranged the easier it is to express them accurately and clearly. When he does start putting his facts into prose, the writer should try to go fairly fast. He should think out each sentence before he writes it, but he should not ponder for too long; he should write broken sentences rather than lose the impulse that is carrying him along.

It is usually difficult to get started. Some people like to start writing a little way down their plan, returning to the opening paragraphs after they have got into the flow of writing. Others start writing without troubling much about how they are expressing themselves, for they know that later they will delete most of the opening. Whichever method one chooses, however, it is worth remembering that pruning always improves introductions. The following, too, are good resolutions:

Do not begin with a dictionary definition, e.g. "According

to the Oxford Dictionary, a cloud is 'a mass of visible condensed watery vapour floating high above the general level of ground'." Do not open with a stale quotation, and be cautious about using any kind of quotation.

Do not begin with a reference to a trite proverb or anecdote, e.g. "The fate of the boy who cried 'Wolf!' is well known to us all."

Do not open with an obvious generalisation, e.g. "Most green apples are sour," or "Nobody nowadays denies the importance of education in making good citizens."

Do not begin by apologising for dealing with the subject you have to write about.

Do not begin by explaining how difficult it is to write about your subject.

Having checked that his introduction does not contain any of these very common weaknesses, the writer should prune it, and then prune it again.

Self-criticism is one of the most valuable habits a writer can have, but it is difficult to acquire. There are, however, two ways in which a writer can discover the weaknesses in his work when he comes to revise it. Firstly, he should put his work away for some time, even if only for an hour or two, and do something that takes his mind entirely from it. Then, when he re-reads it, he will be more like a person coming to it for the first time.

Secondly, he should have a list of points to look for. Looking first at his material, he must search for irrelevancies, repetition, and bad ordering of facts. He may notice that he is constantly saying in different words, "I have now finished with Point A and I propose to pass on to Point B." An inexperienced writer who notices these awkward connections usually tinkers with the wording of them, without success, for they are caused by the bad ordering of facts. Either the facts are not in a sensible order and so do not arise naturally one from the other, or else some link in the argument—clear enough in the writer's mind—has been taken for granted and not explained to the reader. The way to remove these awkward sentences is to check the arrangement of the material.

Looking next at how he has expressed himself, the writer

should try to condense his work, for a first draft that does not need cutting is very rare. He should look out for abstract nouns, the passive voice, "parrot cries"—all the things he has been warned about in the preceding chapters. Some of these will have crept into his work, and must be deleted. Above all, he must remember that by changing his words he is not changing his thoughts. There are a few people who cannot be convinced of this, and they never write well.

There is one useful trick which seems very odd. The writer should look for any passages or sentences in his work that seem to him to be particularly clever writing—and delete them. This advice has been given by, among others, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who puts it like this: "Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it—wholeheartedly—and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings.*"<sup>1</sup>

This trick works. Anyone can test it for himself by making two copies of his work, one with and one without the fine passages; if he puts these away for a year and then re-reads them he will see at once that the plain version is the better.

The writer's last task before making a fair copy of his work is to look over the paragraphing. The paragraphs should have emerged automatically if the facts were well arranged, but it is wise to see how the page looks. Prose appeals to the eye, and pages of unbroken writing do not look attractive, nor do pages broken into many very short paragraphs. About 150 to 200 words is a good average length for a paragraph, but shorter ones should be interspersed. A short paragraph gives the reader a rest, and it can also emphasise an important statement. If the important statement is only one or two sentences, it can be put in a paragraph by itself; if it is longer, it can be preceded by a single sentence paragraph.

Advice about keeping one topic to one paragraph is worthless, for the "completeness" of a topic can no more be defined than can the "completeness" in sense of a sentence. The same advice looks more convincing when we are told not to put two unconnected ideas in the same paragraph, but it is no more useful, for the writer of something in which two unconnected

<sup>1</sup> *The Art of Writing.*

ideas occurred next to each other would have to look to his arrangement, not his paragraphing. A writer does better if he regards his paragraphs, not as a means of parcelling up his subject-matter, but as a means of pleasing, resting and encouraging his reader.

The five stages of composition may seem elaborate, but one soon learns to apply them automatically. It is only by going through these stages, too, that one can satisfactorily make a *précis*.

To make a *précis*, the writer should first read over his material and decide on a title. He may not need this title, but in finding it he will have discovered what the purpose of the original is. He should not therefore proceed until he has found a title that really satisfies him; he should never be content with telling himself, "It's about such-and-such a matter." He must remember that he has not merely to reduce the length of the original but—what is far more important—to underline its main points and its conclusion.

Having found his title, the writer must select the main points in the original, write them down as headings, and under them his sub-headings and notes. He has now finished with the original. He should put it aside and write his *précis* from his notes.

It is a waste of time to try to make a *précis* by any other method. A person in a hurry may attempt to go through a passage a sentence or two at a time, reducing the number of words as he goes along, but the result is always vague, rambling and inconclusive, for all the sentences will have been reduced in roughly the same proportion. In a good *précis* some facts in the original may disappear, others may be re-arranged, and others may be more lengthily expressed than they were in the original. The original must therefore be read as a whole, and the required facts must be carefully selected and arranged. The *précis* must emphasise and make clear the main points and the conclusion of the original; there is no point in merely shortening a piece of writing without doing this.

SQUARE PEGS AND ROUND HOLES

Which peg fits the hole in each sentence?

1. That morning he came — breakfast looking unusually cheerful. (into, in to).
2. The informal dances, — those held on Saturdays, have been well attended. (especially, specially).
3. It was after the first World War that he began his — rise to power. (triumphal, triumphant).

ALL AT SEA

Correct the following sentences.

1. He returned to England four years ago, and since then he has lived between here and the U.S.A.
2. He was offended because no one had consulted his opinion.
3. With this machine we can do the work better, faster and much cheaper.

PLURALS THAT PUZZLE

What are the plurals of the following words?

arena dogma formula primula proforma quota  
agendum curriculum erratum laburnum memor-  
andum medium premium stratum  
apparatus bacillus genius genus gladiolus octopus  
opus prospectus  
basis index thesis

A QUIET LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

1. Make a plan for a précis of the following narrative.

He had a roll in his walk, having been horned in the leg as a lad by a weaning cow. His nose was almost level with his cheeks, having been flattened in.

"Why do they call you Punch?" George asked. "Were you a fighter?"

"No, no, sir," Punch said, "I never could abide fighters. You be going by my nose. Mother did that with the flat iron. No, sir, I was called Punch because I went about with a Punch and blawed the



pipes to en; ah, with old Mr. Dixon, in the Punch and Judy. But Mr. Dixon got into trouble. I don't know who was to blame, there was three of them in it: between 'em they murdered Mr. Jackson out in the road by White Ladies; that would be a long way from here. They cut him across the throat and took his bag full of gold, and put him in a ditch. And they'd a got away, only you see, the man went to the ditch and found en. So Mr. Dixon was hanged with the other two: Barney they called one, ah! and Squeeze-the-cat the other—a yellow man: they was all three hanged.

"Mr. Dixon had got into betting ways, not at the race meetings, he never went to them, but to the fights. They'd a many fights then, all on the grass, with the bare fists; not as 'tis now. When they put Mr. Jackson into the ditch, it was nine o'clock at night, and it was a good ditch full of water and brambled over. He might not a been seen there in a hundred year. But the owner of the field was a Mr. Jones, who made horse mixture. And that very next morning early he dreamed a dream, 'Thy ditch is all bloody,' he dreamed, and then he saw his ditch all full of dead men. So as soon as it was light he said, 'Something terrible's gone with that ditch in the long pasture: I've dreamed dreams of it.' So out he went, and saw where people had been, and the water was all muddy, so he just poked with his stick, and there was Mr. Jackson. It was Barney and Squeeze-the-cat were the worst, but Mr. Dixon was with them: they made no difference then. They had me to court, but I couldn't tell anything. I was in the stable of an inn there, living with the dogs; we'd two dog Tobys, for the old one was getting past it. They put up a big gallows at White Ladies so as to be big enough for the three, and they all came out and made speeches and prayed for the King, and said that it was drinking done it to bring them where they were. Mr. Dixon saw me, and he called out, 'You look after Toby, Jack'; so I said I would; but they told me afterwards that the dogs were all owed because of the expenses. I took up with another Punch after that: Mr. Mildman; and when we had our show broken up by the gipsies we made puppets, but the gipsies broke them, too. There were some very rough sets on the road then, they stuck at nothing. There was often a man or two maimed for life at the May fairs. They'd fight like raging mad, with stakes and bottles, and all sorts. I was in it because I knew no different, but when I got to be a bit older I got out of it and went into the farming way. But they knew I'd been on the roads and that; they've never called me anything but Punch, though it's gone sixty years since I did any."

(John Masefield, *The Hawbucks*.)

2. Write a précis of the above, beginning, "He said . . ."

## 3. Make a plan for a précis of the following:

I am at present in a bustle to defend myself against a very unwarrantable warrant from a Justice of Peace in Chichester, which was taken out against me by a private in Captain Leathes's troop of 1st. or Royal Dragoons, for an assault and seditious words. The wretched man has terribly perjured himself, as has his comrade; for, as to sedition, not one word relating to the King or Government was spoken by either him or me. His enmity arises from my having turned him out of my garden, into which he was invited as an assistant by a gardener at work therein, without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him, as politely as was possible, to go out of the garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threatened to knock out my eyes, with many abominable imprecations and with some contempt for my person; it affronted my foolish pride. I therefore took him by the elbows and pushed him before me till I had got him out; there I intended to have left him, but he, turning about, put himself into a posture of defiance, threatening and swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly and perhaps not, stepped out at the gate, and, putting aside his blows, took him again by the elbows, and, keeping his back to me, pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards—he all the while endeavouring to turn round and strike me, and raging and cursing, which drew out several neighbours; at length, when I had got him to where he was quartered, which was very quickly done, we were met at the gate by the master of the house, the Fox Inn (who is the proprietor of my cottage), and his wife and daughter and the man's comrade and several other people. My landlord compelled the soldiers to go indoors, after many abusive threats against me and my wife from the two soldiers; but not one word of threat on account of sedition was uttered at that time. This method of revenge was planned between them after they had got together into the stable. This is the whole outline. I have for witnesses: the gardener, who is ostler at the Fox and who evidences that, to his knowledge, no word of the remotest tendency to government or sedition was uttered: our next door neighbour, a miller's wife, who saw me turn him before me down the road, and saw and heard all that happened at the gate of the inn, who evidences that no expression of threatening on account of sedition was uttered in the heat of their fury by either of the dragoons; this was the woman's own remark, and does high honour to her good sense, as she observes that, whenever a quarrel happens, the offence is always repeated. The landlord of the inn and his wife and daughter

will evidence the same, and will evidently prove the comrade perjured, who swore that he heard me, while at the gate, utter seditious words and D—the K—, without which perjury I could not have been committed.

(Letter by William Blake.)

4. Write a *précis* of the above. Begin, "Mr. Blake was charged with assault and with uttering seditious words . . ."

#### MORE MISSING MIDDLES

Replace the italicised words by the single words indicated in parentheses.

1. The lake seemed *to extend boundlessly in every direction*.  
(IL . . . . . ABLE)
2. The speech dragged, and at times seemed *as though it would never end*.  
(IN . . . . . ABLE)
3. It has caused damage *that no one can possibly make good*.  
(IR . . . . . ABLE)
4. The handwriting was *so bad that it was impossible to recognise a word of it*.  
(IN . . . . . ABLE)
5. Their conduct has been *such that there is no possibility of any blame being attached to them*.  
(IR . . . . . ABLE)
6. The finished work must be *entirely free from blemishes*.  
(IM . . . . . ABLE)
7. Crouched behind the solid ramparts, the defenders considered that they were *safely protected against any chance of injury*.  
(IN . . . . . ABLE)
8. He showed *the courage of a man who is determined never to be subdued*.  
(IN . . . . . ABLE)
9. The rules are *rigid, and never subject to the smallest alteration*.  
(IM . . . . . ABLE)
10. The more they gave to him, the more it became clear that his greed was *of a kind that was never likely to be satisfied*.  
(IN . . . . . ABLE)

#### VERSATILITY IN VERSE

"A man so various, that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome."

What is an epitome?—an epigram?

## CHAPTER XIV

### FERRETING OUT FACTS<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who writes prose has sooner or later to discover or check facts.

We find facts in books. To discover a fact, therefore, we must first discover a book that contains it. This means using a library, and there are many people who cannot find the facts they need, or find them only after unnecessary labour, because they cannot use a library properly.

A library is a storehouse of facts, and the key to it is the library catalogue. There are two kinds of catalogues commonly used. One is a *dictionary* catalogue, which is a straightforward list, in alphabetical order, of the authors, subjects, and, where necessary, the titles of the books in the library. If well maintained, this is a very convenient form of catalogue for the enquirer, but it has certain disadvantages, and nowadays a *classified* catalogue is often favoured. In a library using this form, the books are catalogued separately under their authors' names, under the subject-matter of the books, and, where necessary, under the titles of the books. The author and title catalogues are in alphabetical order. In the subject catalogue, which includes only non-fiction books and which is the most useful one to the person looking for information, the books are listed in the order in which they stand on the shelves. This order depends upon their subject-matter, and is decided by the classification system the library uses. Whatever the system is—and there are only three or four common systems—there is usually in the library a chart explaining it. Such a chart gives only a bare outline, so many libraries also supply a booklet explaining the classification system. These booklets are usually well produced, but, none the less, a person unfamiliar with a classification system is well advised to ask the librarian to explain

<sup>1</sup> The author's thanks are due to Mr. J. F. W. Bryon, F.L.A., of the Beckenham Public Libraries, for his criticism of this chapter, and for his useful suggestions.

it; he will readily do this, and there is no accepted system that cannot be grasped in its essentials in a few minutes. To use a classified catalogue, the reader has only to look at a subject index and find the subject that seems most likely to include the matter he is interested in; against this he will find a classification symbol (numbers or letters, or both), and if he turns this up in the catalogue he will find listed all the books which deal with that subject. For example, if he is interested in steam engines, and goes to a library that uses the Dewey system of classification (as most public libraries do), he will find a large heading "Useful Arts," labelled 600; under this he will find "Engineering," labelled 620; under this will appear "Mechanical Engineering"—621—, and below that "Steam Engineering," which is 621.1. Under 621.1 he will find in the catalogue details of all the books dealing with steam engines, and, if it is good catalogue, books that have chapters or sections dealing with them.

In the subject catalogue the reader will find cards on which is written "See . . .," followed by a subject, author or title. This means that there is no entry in the catalogue under that particular heading, but the subject will be found under the entry which the reader is directed to "see." For example, if he looked up "Horticulture," he might find "Horticulture, *See* Gardening." This means he must turn to "Gardening," under which heading he will find listed all the material which the library has on gardening.

He will also find entries that contain the words "See also . . .," followed by a subject, author or title. This means that he has come to the end of the entries dealing with a particular subject, and is being referred to related subjects, under which he is likely to find matter that will interest him. To continue with the last example, a person who had gone through all the entries under "Gardening" might find that the last entry was "Gardening. *See also* Bulbs, Agriculture, Flowers, Farming, Lawns."

Anyone who wants to be able to discover facts easily must learn to use a library catalogue efficiently, and he should also make himself familiar with the resources of the public library service.

The reference department of a public library is a valuable source of information. A search for facts, especially about a

subject that is new to one, usually starts from reference books, such as encyclopaedias, yearbooks and gazetteers. A reference library has all these, as well as a selection of books covering many subjects. Often, too, it contains a file of *The Times*, and bound copies of the more important periodicals. There may be an index to the contents of these periodicals, possibly the Library Association's *Subject Index to Periodicals*, which indexes about 500 publications. Some reference libraries also maintain collections of maps and pictures, and of material relating to local industries, history, geography and traditions.

The advisory service of the public libraries is another useful tool. The public librarian will not only explain the resources of his own library and help an enquirer to use them, but he will obtain books for him from outside sources. There is a system by which a public library can obtain books from other public libraries, from regional library bureaux, and finally from the National Central Library. This last, to which application can only be made through a public library, can draw upon more than 21,000,000 books. Books are sent by post, usually within a few days; some public libraries pay the postage both ways, while others require the borrower to pay the postage one way.

There are also special libraries, such as those maintained by learned and professional societies, which are ready to help a genuine enquirer who cannot elsewhere obtain the information he is seeking. A public librarian can often introduce an enquirer to one of these, and he will certainly be able to produce details of them; he usually has *The ASLIB Directory* (published by the Association of Special Library and Information Bureaux), *British Sources of Reference and Information* (edited by T. Besterman and also published by Aslib), and *The Libraries of London* (edited by R. Irwin and published by the Library Association).

There is therefore no reason why the seeker after facts about the most unusual subject should ever fail. Generally, however, a person can find the information he needs in one library, and he should be able to find it for himself. If the subject is new to him, he should begin by consulting an encyclopaedia, and even if he finds his subject in the alphabetical list of articles he should remember that encyclopaedias have indexes—the

*Encyclopaedia Britannica*<sup>1</sup> has a separate index volume. By consulting the index he may discover useful information that he would otherwise have missed. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, has a long article headed "Horticulture"; in the index, under the entry "Horticulture," the reader is also referred to passages in articles entitled "Electrical Power in Agriculture," "Seed Trade," "Arboretum," "Grapes," "Kent, William" (a landscape gardener), and "Rose."

The potted information in an encyclopaedia may be enough for a reader's purpose, but he should not be too easily satisfied. An article in an encyclopaedia compresses a great deal into a small space, and it is hard for a newcomer to the subject to realise what the width of the subject is, and what are the scope and importance of the branches of it. If he wants more information, the reader should look at the bibliographies that appear at the end of articles in many encyclopaedias. These are lists of books that deal with the subject treated in the foregoing article. If he can obtain some of these books, he will find that some of them contain bibliographies, and before long he will have a long list of books on the subject that interests him.

A library catalogue, particularly a classified catalogue, will also enable a reader to find books on any subject he likes, and he may even find that a librarian can provide him with a ready-made list of books. Both the National Book League and the Library Association have published, and are still publishing, "Reader's Guides" and "Book Lists." Each of these is devoted to a single subject, and gives a list of books that deal with it; some typical subjects are "Town and Country Planning," "Ballet," "Colonies," "Films," "Agriculture," "House and Home," "Education," "Handicrafts" and "Music." Some public libraries, too, publish their own select lists of books on certain subjects.

Having obtained a list of books, the reader has to select from

<sup>1</sup> The latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is the fourteenth (1929), but under a plan of "continuous revision" there have been many re-issues, each containing some additional revision; there is also a *Britannica Book of the Year*, designed to keep the Encyclopaedia up to date. *Chambers's Encyclopaedia*, though shorter, is more recent and an excellent compilation; it has a useful index in Volume XV.

it, for he may not wish to see all the books. There are certain things that can help him choose. First, there is the book's date of publication, for technical and commercial books rapidly become out of date. Secondly, there are remarks in bibliographies; some writers give a sentence suggesting the aim and contents of each book listed in their bibliographies, while others use such comments as "a standard work," "a popular account," "an elementary book" or "an advanced study." Moreover, a book that appears in many bibliographies is likely to be a useful one. The publisher of the book, too, is often a useful guide, for some firms specialise in "popular" books, while others are known for their serious academic publications or for books on certain subjects.

Having selected his books, the reader now has to extract his facts. It may sometimes be necessary for him to read a book from cover to cover, but this is unusual. He will make a better use of it by skimming it, and taking from it what he needs. Skimming is an art that should be mastered. There is nothing careless or lazy about it, nor, if it is done properly, is the skimmer likely to miss anything important. He should look first at the table of contents, and if this has summaries of the chapters he will find these most useful. From these he can discover the chapters or sections that seem pertinent to his purpose, and he should look quickly down the pages, not settling down to read them, but gathering roughly what the author has to say. He might next turn to the foreword, as this often explains the aim and scope of the book; sometimes, too, it is the author's conclusions placed first. Then there is the index, in which the reader can look up one or two points that interest him, and then see quickly how the author treats them.

This quick look through the book can be done, after a little practice, in five or ten minutes, and it will tell the reader whether he is going to use the book at all, and, if he is, how he is going to use it. He may decide that he will have to read it all through. More often, he will be able to get what he needs by tracking down some points from the index, and by reading some chapters or portions of chapters. His best plan is to read these selected passages quickly, and note the pages that contain information he will be likely to use, adding perhaps a word indicating what



the information is. For example, in going through a history book seeking facts about the growth of modern ideas of treating criminals, he might find himself with something like this:

*Conditions in Eighteenth Century prisons*, 104-6, 141, 200.

*Howard*, 198-206.

*Peel and the death penalty*, 329.

*Transportation*, 96, 182-5.

*Public executions*, 144, 176-9, 299.

*Reformatories*, 350, 384-5.

When he has looked through all his selected passages, a glance at these notes will show him what facts he has collected, and he can cross out anything he now sees he does not need. He then has only to read more carefully the pages that are left in his notes, and make fuller notes of them. He should write these notes on loose sheets of paper, keeping separate sheets for each topic, and never writing on both sides of the paper. Then, as he consults other books, he can add further notes in the proper places, and finally, when he has gathered all his material, he can arrange his loose sheets in whatever order he chooses. He need worry no more about his subject-matter. The facts are there, he has arranged them in the right order, and he has now to communicate them to other people. He must determine to be:

ACCURATE

CLEAR

BRIEF

\* \* \* \*

ARE THESE YOUR FRIENDS?

What book would you get if you asked a librarian for:

1. Brewer? 2. Kelly? 3. Burke? 4. Wisden? 5. Jane?

WITH REFERENCE TO BOOKS

What book would you consult to discover:

(a) where the Prime Minister was educated?

(b) the qualifications of a local doctor?

(c) a list of the parliamentary constituencies of Great Britain?

- (d) who wrote, "Procrastination is the thief of time"?
- (e) where in Great Britain is Weston Zoyland, and what is its population?
- (f) the rule about writing *-ise* or *-ize* in words such as "colonise"?
- (g) the circumstances of the formation of the present French government?
- (h) brief details of the life of Hogarth, the eighteenth-century artist?
- (i) a synonym for the word "cheerful"?
- (j) the value last year of the imports and exports of St. Helena?

What, in a sentence, is the difference between an encyclopaedia and a dictionary?

What is the most complete dictionary of the English language?

What is a concordance?

## BOOKS

Here are suggestions for further reading. All the following books are lively, interesting, and instructive, and most of them are quite short.

### *On the writing of direct English*

B. Ifor Evans: *The Use of English* (Staples Press, 1949).

Sir Ernest Gowers: *Plain Words* (H.M.S.O., 1948).

Sir Alan Herbert: *What a Word!* (Methuen, 1935).

### *On the dangers of confused and abstract expression*

Stuart Chase: *The Tyranny of Words* (Methuen, 1938).

Leonard Woolf: *Quack! Quack!* (Hogarth Press, 1935).

### *On speech, and the difference between spoken and written English*

A. Lloyd-James: *Our Spoken Language* (Nelson, 1938).

### *On grammar*

Otto Jespersen: *Essentials of English Grammar*<sup>1</sup> (Allen and Unwin, 1933).

### *On punctuation*

G. V. Carey: *Mind the Stop* (Cambridge University Press, 1939).

### *On the development of the English Language*

L. Pearsall Smith: *The English Language* (Oxford University Press, 1911).

### *On finding information*

Lionel McColvin: *How to Find Out* (C.U.P., 2nd ed., 1947).

Lionel McColvin: *How to Use Books* (C.U.P., 2nd ed., 1947).

William Bagley: *Facts and How to Find Them* (Pitman, 3rd ed., 1948).

### *For reference on problems of sentence construction, choice of words, punctuation, etc.*

H. W. Fowler: *Modern English Usage* (O.U.P., 1926).

Eric Partridge: *Usage and Abusage* (Hamilton, 4th ed., 1948).

Sir Ernest Gowers: *A.B.C. of Plain Words* (H.M.S.O., 1951).

<sup>1</sup> This book is longer and more difficult than the others in the list, but it is the best book for anyone who wishes to study grammar thoroughly.

# ANSWERS

## CHAPTER I

### PAINLESS EXTRACTIONS

page 7

1. primeval. 2. extempore. 3. imperturbable. 4. authentic. 5. versatile. 6. parsimonious. 7. perfunctory. 8. implicit. 9. infallible. 10. flippant.

### HORRIBLE OUTRAGES

1. Accuracy. We do not know whether the author intends: I am not writing to him and my reason is that I am angry, *or*: I am writing to him, but my reason is not that I am angry.
2. Brevity. The sentence means: We should always try to write concisely.
3. Accuracy. "Literally petrified" means that they were actually turned to stone. Omit "literally."
4. Accuracy. Does the writer mean that the rule was absolute, or that the people were absolutely savage? Rewrite: . . . he was absolute ruler over . . . *or* . . . ruled people who were absolutely savage . . .
5. Brevity. "That he kept for his own private use" repeats "his personal." Omit one of these.
6. Clarity. It is impossible to discover what this means.
7. Accuracy. Who was fishing? Rewrite: A coastguard who was fishing from the rocks was the last to see the missing man; *or*: The missing man, who was then fishing from the rocks, was last seen by a coastguard.
8. Accuracy. The sentence may mean: Both the king and his ministers were anxious to conciliate the bishops; *or*: The king was anxious to conciliate his ministers and the bishops.
9. Clarity. Who was the leader of the expedition? Rewrite: Mr. Brown has written a general account, and to this Mr. Smith has added . . . etc., and insert "the leader of the expedition" after whoever was the leader.
10. Clarity. Rewrite: An employee entitled to two weeks' leave may take it at any time between January 1st and December 31st, if the Head of his Department agrees, but any leave not taken by December 31st is forfeited.

### DEATHLESS DITTY

page 8

No. This was intended to be serious.

### EASY MONEY

- (a) white. (b) yellow or light brown. (c) blood-red. (d) bright red (e) a bluish, lead colour; the word could be applied to a deep, bluish purple, hence probably the expression "livid with anger." (f) yellow, (g) bright, clear red, on a pale background.

## CHAPTER II

## REMOVE THE REPTILES

*page 12*

1. When he arrived he found his colleagues very excited.
2. He said that the process was too expensive for us.
3. The writer should try to make his sentences clear and precise.
4. We hope soon to announce exactly when he will arrive.
5. His collected poems will probably be published later this year.

## A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

*page 13*

1. its. 2. their.

## GATECRASHERS

1. prescribe. 2. legible. 3. infer. 4. nocturnal. 5. morbid.

## CONVERSATION AT THE ZOO

"No, dear, it's its nose." (it's = it is; its = of it).

## CHAPTER III

## TRY YOUR SKILL

*page 16*

1. speaker. 2. head of the family. 3. anybody. 4. struggle. 5. whoever came in last and forgot to shut the gate. 6. that he was lying. 7. precautions. 8. crossing the road in the rush hour. 9. to find one's way. 10. You—implied, though not stated.

## WHOM DO THE CAPS FIT?

*page 19*

1. Rivers. When two rivers flow into one another they are confluent.
2. A seaport. It means the district behind a coast, or behind a river's banks.
3. A speech. It is the concluding part of a speech, usually a summing-up.
4. A treaty. It is the original draft of the terms of a treaty, agreed to and signed by the parties.
5. A disease. An endemic disease is one that is regularly found in certain areas, or among certain peoples; it does not disappear and return as an epidemic disease does.
6. A building. It would mean that it was in a style of architecture characterised by irregular outlines and lavish decoration.
7. An ambassador. An ambassador is a plenipotentiary when he has been granted full power to act on his own initiative.
8. An assembly. It means fully attended.
9. A singer. It means one specialising in highly-coloured passages. It is almost invariably applied to sopranos.
10. A painting. It refers to the treatment of light and shade.

## REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

page 20

1. A native appeared who we were told would act as our guide.
2. The army was now halted, and busily preparing its positions against attack.
3. The reader of travel books can learn about social conditions in other countries, and compare them with conditions in his own.
4. They scorn to seek advice from us who are mere amateurs.
5. The business was started some years ago by my wife and me.

## MORE MONEY FOR OLD ROPE

*Continual* describes something that goes on and on, perhaps with short breaks, but to which we foresee no end, e.g. the continual roar of London traffic, or the continual noise of ships' sirens in a fog. *Continuous* describes something that goes on from start to finish without a pause, no matter how short the whole performance may be, e.g. a continuous blast on a bugle.

*Judicial* refers to the law, i.e. to courts, judges, pleas, decisions. *Judicious* refers to an ordinary person's power of judgment, and means sensible, prudent, wise. In *Modern English Usage*, Fowler points out that the distinction between judicial and judicious is clear enough, "except that *judicial* has one use that brings it near to *judicious*: this use is *impartial* or *such as might be expected of a judge or lawcourt*, applied to such words as *view, conduct, care, investigation*, to which *judicious* is also applicable in the sense of wise or sagacious or prudent."

*Reverend* means deserving reverence, and is mainly used as a clergyman's title. *Reverent* means showing reverence, e.g. a person's manner may be reverent.

*Skilled* distinguishes those who have acquired skill from those (the unskilled) who have not. *Skilful* describes either a person who can properly apply skill, or work to which skill has been properly applied. Any skilled man can do skilled work; a skilful man—one who both has skill and can use it cleverly—can do skilful work.

## COMIC RELIEF

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is in one volume, and the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* is in two volumes.

## CHAPTER IV

## DUAL ROLES

*page 25*

Examples are:

- (a) the French people  
a ringing voice  
a subject race  
a watch tower  
white paint

- (b) The French are a Latin race  
the ringing of bells  
a subject of the king  
a reliable watch  
White dazzles the eyes.

## ODD COUPLES

oral—mouth; regal—king; mural—wall; filial—son; aural—ear;  
lacteal—milk; labial—lip; lateral—side; arboreal—tree; sidereal—star.

## REMEMBER YOUR WATCHWORD

1. A committee of planners should meet from time to time to discuss these problems.
2. The sea was calm, and reflected every detail of the ship.
3. We do not expect conditions to improve for some time.
4. After consideration, I concluded that the committee members were not enthusiastic.
5. Many more technicians will soon be needed on the land, since farming is daily becoming more mechanised.
6. It was in those days a hamlet of about twenty cottages, occupied by fishermen and farm labourers. There was no railway nearer than the county town, and the road from there was little better than a cart track.

## ARE YOU A SOCIAL SUCCESS?

*page 26*

1. (b). 2. (a). 3. (c). 4. (a). 5. (b).

## HOW TO KEEP THE PARTY CLEAN

1. Only improper people are certain to be admitted.
2. The manager can refuse to admit anyone he thinks undesirable.

## CHAPTER V

## -IST LIST

*page 32*

1. linguist. 2. bigamist. 3. polygamist. 4. philatelist. 5. philanthropist. 6. misanthropist. 7. misogynist. 8. somnambulist. 9. evangelist. 10. plagiarist.

## WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

1. adj. 2. adj. 3. adj. 4. noun. 5. pronoun. 6. adj. 7. adj.  
8. noun. 9. noun. 10. noun (= my birthplace).

## MISSING LINKS

page 33

1. that. 2. who. 3. which. 4. that. 5. that, or who; "that" is preferable, to avoid "Who . . . who . . ." 6. that, which. 7. such as. 8. which. 9. as. 10. that.

## ERRING RELATIVES

1. We have noted the clauses that you require to be altered in the agreement. It would be better to separate "clauses" and "agreement," e.g. We have received the agreement, and noted the clauses that you require to be altered.
2. He chose a place which was near his house, and which he could see from his bedroom window.
3. We came to the place that we passed two hours before.
4. Nobody knows what Jones was, or what he did, during the war.
5. Candidates must obtain 40% of the marks, or fail. (*Better:* The pass mark is 40%.)

## TREBLE CHOICES

page 34

changeable, giddy, volatile; excusable, pardonable, venial; hedonistic, sybaritical, voluptuous; laconic, succinct, terse; morose, saturnine, sombre.

## O.K.?

Never. However the words are used, they should always be written ALL RIGHT.

## CHAPTER VI

## VERBAL EXCHANGES

page 41

assiduous—persevering; bucolic—rustic; equivocal—questionable; implacable—relentless; importunate—pressing; improvident—thriftless; indigent—penniless; sedulous—diligent; trenchant—cutting; turgid—swollen.

## WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?

1. gerund. 2. present participle, gerund. 3. infinitive. 4. past participle. 5. present participle.

## AWKWARD CUSTOMERS

1. Wrong. I do not object to your borrowing the bicycle. A pronoun and a participle should not be fused.
2. Wrong. He was suffering from depression, caused by his wife's having been killed in a road accident. The sense demands "wife's," as the cause was "having been killed," i.e. "death." The sentence could be amended: "because his wife had been killed" or "by his wife's death."



3. Wrong. The badly split fused participle "horse . . . winning" makes the sentence ungainly. "Horse's winning" is impossible, for "that" then has no noun to refer to, so the sentence must be recast, e.g. A horse that has not been carefully trained is very unlikely to win the race.
4. Right. "Leaving" is a present participle.
5. Wrong. "Members of the audience . . . lighting" is an awkward fused participle, and it is split. There is no way of making "members of the audience" possessive, and to change "upsets" to "upset" spoils the sense. A new sentence is required, e.g. The actors are upset if members of the audience are constantly lighting cigarettes during the performance.

## RESCUE WORK

page 41

1. When I called upon him yesterday, he kindly offered me the use of his country cottage.
2. As he had travelled almost across Europe on foot, the journey from Dover to London meant little to him.
3. Even though there are difficulties of race and religion, it is yet possible that a leader will arise to unite the people.
4. He was known to have misunderstood the message completely; *or*: He was known to have completely misunderstood the message.
5. The enemy's guns having been silenced, *or*: As we had silenced the enemy's guns, there was no reason why our advance should not continue, *or*: Having silenced the enemy's guns, there was no reason why we should not continue our advance.
6. Because of, *or* Owing to the meeting at four o'clock, the letters will have to be finished by 3.30 today.
7. Even though they could not understand the language, they could detect the menace in the men's voices; *or* (*less satisfactory*): The menace in the men's voices could be detected even by people who could not understand the language.
8. The word order suggests that "they" means "shareholders," but "modified" suggests that "they" means "proposals." Assuming that "they" means "proposals," the sentence should read: The shareholders thought that the proposals were rash, and would cause a loss of money if they were not modified. If "they" means "shareholders," the sentence should be: The shareholders thought that they would lose money if the proposals, which they considered rash, were not modified.
9. The scheme has great possibilities, and ought to be thoroughly examined. It is unnecessary to split the infinitive, and to use both "thoroughly" and "diligently." "Most" can be omitted.
10. A possible correction is: In reply to your letter of 9th June, we are pleased to inform you that our representative will call on you next week.

## UNCOMMON KNOWLEDGE

page 42

A *protagonist* is the chief person in a drama, contest, party, etc.

The quotation, from Pope, is: "A little learning is a dangerous thing."

A *leading question* is one in which the questioner puts into the question the answer he desires. For example, "Did you see anyone there?" becomes a leading question if framed as, "You saw the Accused there, didn't you?"

*Proves* here means "tests," a meaning which the word once had, but which it has now lost in ordinary usage.

## HOLIDAY HINT

Not to book accommodation in advance is unlikely to cause death, and is not therefore a "fatal" mistake. Do not use "fatal" as though it meant "serious."

## CHAPTER VII

## PRACTICE BOUT

page 47

1. The police warned motorists that the roads across the moors were dangerous.
2. The place is unsuitable for an airport, as there are many fogs.
3. We could not obtain food because we could not make the natives understand us.
4. This occurred before the report was published.
5. He fully agreed with what the chairman had said.

## CHALKS AND CHEESES

amenable—obstinate; anomalous—normal; astute—naïve; docile—refractory; evanescent—permanent; flagitious—honourable; florid—unadorned; inexorable—lenient; resilient—stiff.

## RINGING THE CHANGES

Examples are:

- (a) a bowl of flowers  
the end of the tale  
a show of hands  
a stand in the market-place  
articles of value

- (b) I bowl better than I bat.  
I end my day at ten o'clock.  
Show him the way.  
Please stand here.  
We value this highly.

- (c) a chill wind  
a clean sheet  
an open book  
a smooth path  
a stray cat

- (d) We chill the liquid with ice.  
Clean the place well.  
Open the door.  
They smooth the wood with planes.  
Cats seldom stray from home.

## ANY OBJECTS?

*page 48*

1. Convicted; object, "him."
4. Proved; object, "the calculations to be correct."
5. Did believe; object, "a word of his story."

## REACHING COMPLETE AGREEMENT

1. was. 2. is. 3. are. 4. have. 5. decides.

## LAME DOGS

1. Each of them went out every morning exercising his dogs.
2. If the work is attempted, and leads to a loss of money, who will be responsible for the debts?
3. They (I, he, we, etc.) intend to carry out important reforms shortly; *or (less satisfactory):* The intention is to carry out important reforms shortly.
4. If I were in your place, I would accept his offer.
5. We cannot carry out such an ambitious scheme at a moment's notice, as we attempted to do last year.

## TRIPLE ALLIANCES

acumen, perception, perspicacity; calamity, catastrophe, visitation; calumny, aspersion, obloquy; caprice, vagary, whim; clarity, lucidity, perspicuity; deluge, cataclysm, inundation; emergency, crisis, exigency; eulogy, encomium, panegyric; omen, augury, portent; remedy, cure, panacea.

## NOT ENOUGH SCENE SHIFTERS?

*page 49*

The reader takes "as well as" to mean "in addition to," and then discovers that it means "as effectively as." The sentence should be written: The theatre cannot present a crowd scene as effectively as the cinema can.

## CHAPTER VIII

## WAGGING THEIR TAILS BEHIND THEM

*page 57*

acquiesce in; adverse to; averse to; comment on, upon; consequent on; dissimilar to; equally with; independent of; oblivious of; sensible of.

## IDENTIFICATION PARADE

1. adv. 2. prep. 3. adv. 4. adv. 5. conj. 6. adv. 7. conj.
8. prep. 9. adv. 10. adv.

## LABOUR EXCHANGE

page 57

Examples are:

- (a) a hard frost  
a clear liquid  
a fast journey  
most people  
a high tower

- (b) He hit it hard.  
He broke clear of the crowd.  
We travelled fast.  
a most beautiful scene.  
He is flying high.

## COMING TO FITTING ENDS

1. No. The verb is "to make up" and it should not be divided.
2. Yes. "Man" and "to" are too far apart. Rewrite: This is the man to whom I gave all the books, papers and photographs.
3. No. The verb is "referred to," and it is close enough to "letter."

## SUNDRY SNARES

page 58

1. I left early because there are no convenient trains in the evening; *or (less satisfactory):* My reason for leaving early was that there are no convenient trains in the evening.
2. The new method is as efficient as the old, and much cheaper.
3. Every one of the documents should be checked, but that is too large a task; *or:* Every one of the documents should be checked; that, however, is too large a task.
4. There is now some doubt whether the law will ever come into force.
5. He lost not only his money, but also his reputation.

## WANDERING WILLIES

1. The real purpose of the scheme seems to have been completely overlooked.
2. The disease has now been stamped out, and it may be confidently said that it is unlikely to reappear.
3. His dispute with the guide kept the whole party standing about in the hot sun for nearly half an hour.
4. We receive dozens of testimonials, which are always quite unsolicited.
5. We supply these goods in one quality only.
6. He tried to the best of his ability to fashion a new career from the ruins of the old.
7. Far-sighted business men are already preparing plans to develop these new markets.
8. We therefore advise beginners not to attempt these exercises without the aid of a teacher.
9. When carefully examined, the theory will be found to be fundamentally unsound.
10. Drivers of cars that are not properly maintained are day after day endangering the lives of themselves and their fellow-citizens.

## TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE

page 59

*Admit to* is to allow access to a person, place or privilege: *admit of* is to leave room for improvement, doubt, etc.

You *compete with* a person *in* doing something.

*Continue* is to go on with: *continue in* is to remain in office, position, etc.: *continue at* is to remain in one place.

*Agree to* is to consent to a proposal, statement, etc.: *agree with* is to concur with a person.

*Concerned about* is to be anxious, solicitous; *concerned in* is to have an interest or share: *concerned with* is to have relation or reference to.

You *concur in* an opinion, *with* a person.

*Correspond to* is to agree in character, position, or function: *correspond with* is to communicate by letter. (*Correspond with* is frequently wrongly used where *correspond to* is required.)

You are *vexed at* an occurrence, *with* a person.

## TAILPIECE

There is no difference between "while" used as a conjunction and "whilst," but "while" should be preferred. "Whilst" has an old-fashioned and pseudo-poetic air.

## CHAPTER IX

## FACTS AND FANCIES

page 69

*To aggravate* is to make worse something that is already unpleasant or difficult, e.g. Bad weather aggravated their troubles.

*To anticipate* is to use or consider in advance, and contains the idea of forestalling, e.g. "to anticipate his arrival" is to get there before him, but "to expect his arrival" implies no action.

*Conducive to* means leading to or producing some result, e.g. Hard work is conducive to success. The wrong use is seen in: The valley is conducive to flooding; this should be: The valley is liable to flood.

*To feel* is to have a vague, emotional conviction, e.g. I feel that this is wrong, means: I am uneasy about this, but I have no logical reason for my uneasiness. I think this is wrong, means: I have reached my conclusion after thinking about the matter.

*Individual* should only be used when a single person is contrasted to a group of persons, e.g. Parties of six are admitted for 5/-, but individuals are charged 1/-.

*Mutual* implies a relationship between two persons or things. In a mutual understanding, A understands B, and B understands A. A common mistake is to introduce a third element. In a "mutual" problem there are A, B, and the problem; in a "mutual" friend there are A, B, and the friend. These are wrong, and should be corrected to "a common problem" and "a friend of ours, theirs, etc."

*To transpire* means to come to become known, e.g. It transpired that he had been taking bribes.

The uses given for *conducive to*, *mutual*, and *transpire* are wrong. Those for *aggravate* and *anticipate* are also wrong, but have become so common that it seems that at any rate "aggravate" in the sense of "irritate" will come to be accepted. The uses given for *feel* and *individual* are sometimes completely wrong, but more often careless and vague.

## CUTTING THE CACKLE

page 69

1. This work is tiring, as it demands great concentration.
2. Most of the accommodation supplied was only temporary.
3. You must discover at once how many machines are available now.
4. This play is easy to produce.
5. I suspected that these men were dishonest, and most of them were.  
(Note that "suspicious" was wrongly used. You suspect a person's honesty, not his dishonesty; or you suspect that he is dishonest.)

## HELL-BREW

Shaw's words are:

"I will never take a husband. A man in Toul took an action against me for breach of promise; but I never promised him. I am a soldier; I do not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman."

## DEAR OLD PALS

page 70

1. partaking—drinking (strictly, *to partake* is *to take a share of*); beverage—drink; decease—death; acquaint with—tell; factor—cause; outcome—result; immediate—first; reaction—action, behaviour; deem—think; terminate—end; mentality—mind, character; encounter—meet; concourse—group, crowd, gathering; associates—friends, acquaintances; incumbent upon—have to, must, ought, should, be obliged; render—make.

The passage might be rewritten:

Drinking spirits was a cause of the premature death of Uncle George. When his doctor told him what this would lead to, he decided to give up the habit; but whenever he met a group of his friends he felt he had to join them in their drinking, and always forgot his good resolution before long.

2. (c), if you reserve (d) for writing that contains grammatical mistakes and ambiguous sentences.
3. It was specially written.

## POLITE CONVERSATION

1 and 8. 2 and 9. 3 and 6. 4 and 10. 5 and 7.

## THE KNOCK-OUT

page 71

- (a) The writer presents the abstract idea as a concrete image. Milton uses a green hill with a steep path running up it.
- (b) The device is used because the mind can comprehend a concrete image much more easily than it can comprehend an abstract idea.
- (d) Yes. Because our minds do not easily comprehend abstract ideas, too many abstract nouns will tire the reader, and perhaps bewilder him.

## HEAVENLY TWINS

"Although" cannot be used in the expression "as though," nor can it be used in sentences of the pattern, "I was sorry afterwards, though." Otherwise, "although" and "though" are interchangeable. "Although" is slightly more formal, and it is usually used when it opens the statement, e.g. Although we wore our overcoats we were very cold. *But:* We were very cold though (*or* although) we wore our overcoats.

## CHAPTER X

## HAPPY COUPLES

page 81

bellicose—warlike; beneficial—salutary; celestial—heavenly; clandestine—secret; earthly—mundane; felicitous—happy; healthy—salubrious; impecunious—poor; lively—vivacious; true—veracious.

## CLAUSES—AND EFFECTS

1. The harvest was poor because the summer was unusually wet.
2. He mentioned that you had written to him about this.
3. As it is very low-built, the vehicle cannot be used on rough tracks.
4. We noticed that they could move silently through the forest.
5. A person can claim income tax relief if he has aged relatives to support;  
*or:* A person who has aged relatives to support can claim income tax relief.

There is little to choose between the two versions of 1 and 3, but the others are much better with clauses.

## TO BE AND NOT TO BE

page 82

1. A trader buys and sells goods.
2. A path leads from the ferry to the woods.
3. No trains leave this station before 7 o'clock.
4. This type of house has four bedrooms.
5. The company aims to produce a cheap and reliable article.

## BLACK SHEEP FOR BLEACHING

1. Some novels, for example those of Charles Dickens, are written to expose social evils.
2. The house was a gaunt edifice on the edge of the marshes; stunted

trees afforded it no shelter, and the bleak wind howled continuously through it.

3. If he makes an alteration on the document now, he will be guilty of forgery, which is a serious crime, and one that he would not dare to commit.
4. He hoped that he would still be able to help his partner, but was no longer confident that he could recover his partner's money.
5. Six soldiers stepped forward, and on the word of command marched to the sides of the quadrangle.

## THE PERILS OF PARTICIPLES

page 82

1. Because or As it is situated on low ground, the house is damp in winter.
2. If one looks to the south-east one can obtain a magnificent view of the Thames Valley.
3. There have been complaints about long delays at booking offices; these delays have caused passengers to miss their trains.
4. As it was written in great haste, while the author was preoccupied with family troubles, there are many faults in the book.
5. Nowadays we have machines that carry men through the air. This is an achievement that was previously thought impossible.

## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

page 83

One solution is:

Let us . . . the towers. Then let us go through the low stone gateway . . . and the chapter. Here there are . . . trim houses. These have little oriel . . . on one side. Let us go forward until we . . . or shaft. These houses look in front on . . . nurserymaids.

## MISSING MIDDLES

approbation; agitation; adulation; gratification; mortification; duration; confiscation; federation; oblation; attenuation; concatenation.

## HEADLINE

page 84

1. (b). 2. It is a good headline because its ambiguity attracts the reader's notice. It is a bad statement of fact. A good headline is very rarely a good statement of fact. It aims to evoke emotion—curiosity—in the reader, not to state a fact.

## CHAPTER XI

## MISLEADING LITTLE LIKENESSES

page 96

*Accessory* is used mainly of people, and conveys the idea of intentional complicity, e.g. a person who is an accessory to a crime either knowingly takes part in it or helps a criminal or criminals to commit the crime or to escape. *Accessory* is usually applied to things, and suggests something



that helps in a minor way to produce the final result, e.g. a machine may have several accessory parts, or accessories. Both words are used as nouns and adjectives.

*Dependant* is the spelling when the word is a noun. *Dependent* is the adjective, e.g. a man has no dependants when he has no one dependent upon him.

*Efficient* means competent, capable of carrying out work effectively, e.g. an efficient machine, person, method. *Efficacious* is only applied to things, and means that they will achieve the purpose for which they were intended, e.g. a drug may be efficacious in curing a disease.

*Eminent* means distinguished, outstanding, e.g. an eminent politician.

*Imminent* means impending, about to happen, e.g. an imminent disaster.

*Imperative* means like, or expressing, an order, and hence urgent, e.g. an imperative demand. *Imperious* means domineering, dictatorial, e.g. an imperious manner.

*To simulate* is to pretend to have, do, feel or believe what one does not really have, do, feel or believe, e.g. to simulate affection, illness. *To dissimulate* is to hide one's real thoughts or feelings, hence to be hypocritical.

A *vocation* is an occupation or calling. An *avocation* is a part-time occupation, properly something that takes one away from one's vocation.

#### CLEARING OUT THE RUBBISH

page 96

1. The policeman's presence of mind averted a disaster.
2. Only club members may use the car park.
3. When the band had taken up its position behind the flagstaff, the standard was hoisted and the chaplain read prayers.
4. Anyone who has lived in the East will know that punctuality is not as important as we suppose.
5. The agenda for the meeting will be announced later.
6. Everyone one must admire the progress that the society has already made.
7. Tenants should seek advice about their legal position from their own solicitors.
8. The accused must have deliberately planned the crime.
9. We must remember that we ourselves disagreed seriously over this matter.
10. The farmers were facing ruin through drought and labour troubles, and because there had been outbreaks of cattle disease earlier in the year.
11. We cannot increase our deliveries until supplies and prices become normal again.
12. French scientists did some minor experiments in the nineteenth century, but apart from these he was the first man to attempt this research.
13. If he had not received several large sums of money from the plaintiff everyone would have supposed that purely friendly motives prompted him.

14. The world's economics can be seriously upset if wealthy creditor nations will not invest their capital abroad.
15. The audience did not fully grasp that the playwright intended to satirise our system of government.

## -ATE TO ABBREVIATE

*page 97*

1. animated. 2. violated. 3. permeated. 4. dominated. 5. misappropriated. 6. precipitated. 7. emancipated. 8. obliterated. 9. alleviated. 10. eradicated, extirpated.

## BY THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE

*page 98*

3. 1. 2. 4. (No. 4 is a more direct statement than No. 2, but it is much too idiomatic to be used in factual writing.)

## CHAPTER XII

## FAMILIAR CITIES

*page 109*

1. ferocity. 2. velocity. 3. simplicity. 4. voracity, rapacity. 5. loquacity. 6. tenacity. 7. pugnacity. 8. duplicity. 9. audacity. 10. sagacity.

## REQUEST PROGRAMME

1. Would you please inform us if there is any possibility of finishing the work this week?
2. Please inform us if there is any possibility of finishing the work this week.
3. Please inform us: is there any possibility of finishing the work this week?

## ETIQUETTE HINT

I beg your pardon = I apologise.

I beg your pardon? = Please repeat what you said.

## MARK THE DIFFERENCE

- (a) Tell me who came in first.
- (b) Tell me, who came in first?

## HERE YOU STOP

*page 110*

1. The house had been unoccupied for years. It was in a deplorable condition. *Or:* The house had been unoccupied for years; it was in a deplorable condition.
2. The judge having finished his summing-up, the jury retired.
3. I thought to myself, "How can I possibly escape from here?"

4. Their clothes are made from a woollen cloth which they spin, weave, and dye, in their cottages.
5. When they opened the box they found in it a packet of papers wrapped in oilskin, tied, and heavily sealed; it was coated with dust and had obviously lain undisturbed for years.
6. They had to approach the buffaloes cautiously: these animals charge at sight.
7. The building is completely fire proof now that fire-proof doors have been fitted.
8. To have faced these dangers alone, in a strange place and in complete darkness, would have required great courage; and the watchman's nerves, steady though they usually were, had already been severely strained.
9. A land of merciless cold, cut off from the refinements of civilization, peopled by lawless men and ruled by the gun—that is the setting for the drama.
10. Did the prisoner actually use the words, "I'll be revenged on him"?

## POET'S CORNER

page 110

- (a) What do you think?  
I shaves for a penny—  
And asks you to drink.
- (b) What! Do you think  
I shaves for a penny,  
And asks you to drink?

## "HOW FORCIBLE ARE RIGHT WORDS"

page 111

1. audible. 2. comprchensible. 3. plausible. 4. corruptible. 5. con-temptible. 6. feasible. 7. incontrovertible. 8. reprehensible.  
9. apprehensible. 10. indefeasible.

## EMBARRASSING MOMENT

A hyphen will not solve this problem. The expression must be changed to "an assistant games mistress," or "a deputy games mistress."

## CHAPTER XIII

## SQUARE PEGS AND ROUND PEGS

page 117

1. in to. The words should be written separately when the sense demands it.
2. especially. *Especially* means "more so than usual, or more so than others"; *specially* means "for a particular purpose."
3. triumphant. *Triumphal* can only mean "connected with a ceremony celebrating a triumph," e.g. a triumphal march or triumphal procession.

## ALL AT SEA

page 117

1. He returned to England four years ago, and since then he has lived either here or in the U.S.A.
2. He was offended because no one had consulted him; *or*: He was offended because no one had asked his opinion.
3. With this machine we can do the work better, faster, and much more cheaply.

## PLURALS THAT PUZZLE

arenas; dogmas (dogmata is occasionally used); formulas or formulae (the former is preferable in non-technical writing); primulas; proformas (the form "proformae" is completely wrong); quotas; agenda; curricula; errata; laburnums; memoranda; mediums; premiums; strata; pieces of apparatus; bacilli; geniuses; genera; gladioluses; or gladioli; octopuses ("octopi" is wrong); no plural; prospectuses; bases; indexes (indices is used only in mathematics); theses.

Note that words in *-a* do not necessarily have *ae* in the plural, those in *-um* do not necessarily have *a*, and those in *-us* do not necessarily have *i*. As far as possible, prefer the English plural in *-s*.

## A QUIET LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

1. A suggestion is:

Why he was called "Punch"

- (1) His name
  - (a) broken nose
  - (b) played bagpipes in Dixon's Punch and Judy
- (2) The murder
  - (a) Dixon and two others murder Jackson
  - (b) body discovered, criminals hanged
- (3) Subsequent career
  - (a) rough life as a travelling showman
  - (b) becomes farm labourer

2. A suggestion is:

He said he was called Punch, not because his nose was flattened, but because he had in his youth played the bagpipes with a Punch and Judy show owned by a Mr. Dixon. Dixon, who had lost money betting on prize fights, joined with two other men and murdered and robbed a Mr. Jackson, whose body they hid in a ditch. The body was discovered next day by the owner of the field where the ditch was, and the three murderers were hanged.

Punch then joined another Punch and Judy show, but after attacks by gypsies he realised that the travelling showman's life was hard and dangerous, and went to work on the land. After sixty years the name "Punch" still clung to him.

3. A suggestion is:

Charges against Mr. Blake

*page 119*

- (1) The charges
- (2) Denial of assault
  - (a) Dragoon ejected from garden
  - (b) Dragoon forced to the Fox Inn
- (3) Denial of Sedition
  - (a) reason for charge
  - (b) defence witnesses
    - (i) gardener
    - (ii) neighbour
    - (iii) landlord, wife, daughter

4. A suggestion is:

*page 120*

Mr. Blake was charged with assault and with uttering seditious words. His gardener, unknown to him, had invited a private of Captain Leathes's troop of the Royal Dragoons to help in the garden. Blake asked this man to leave, but he refused and insulted Blake. Blake thereupon seized the Dragoon from behind by the elbows and pushed him into the street. The Dragoon then threatened to attack Blake, who replied by pushing him in the same way to the Fox Inn, where the Dragoon was billeted. There they were met by the Dragoon's comrade and the landlord of the inn, who compelled the two soldiers to go inside. Blake had only used reasonable force to eject a trespasser and then, mainly in self-defence, pushed him to the Fox Inn.

Blake claimed that the two soldiers had later trumped up the charge of sedition, as nothing was said about sedition during the quarrel. His gardener would testify that no seditious words were uttered in the garden. His neighbour, a miller's wife, who witnessed the whole incident, would testify not only that Blake used no seditious words, but also that neither soldier accused him during the quarrel of having done so. The landlord of the Fox Inn and his wife and daughter would corroborate these statements.

#### MORE MISSING MIDDLES

*page 120*

- 1. illimitable.    2. interminable.    3. irreparable.    4. indecipherable.
- 5. irreproachable.    6. impeccable.    7. invulnerable.    8. indomitable.
- 9. immutable.    10. insatiable.

#### VERSATILITY IN VERSE

An epitome is a summary or abstract. When used figuratively, it means something that is a perfect miniature of some larger thing, e.g. the man mentioned in the verse represented in himself all the qualities and accomplishments of the whole of mankind. An epigram is a witty, pointed, and often biting remark, e.g. the verse quoted (which is by Dryden).

## CHAPTER XIV

## ARE THESE YOURS FRIENDS?

page 126

1. E. C. Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Brewer is also the author of another useful reference book, *Reader's Handbook of famous names in fiction, allusions, references, proverbs, plots, stories and poems*.
2. Kelly's *Directory*, probably of whatever town or county you happened to be in.
3. Burke's *Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage* or Burke's *Landed Gentry*.
4. Wisden's *Cricketers' Almanac*.
5. Jane's *Fighting Ships* or Jane's *All the World's Aircraft*.

## WITH REFERENCE TO BOOKS

1. (a) *Who's Who*.
- (b) *The Medical Directory*.
- (c) *Whitaker's Almanack*.
- (d) *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.
- (e) Bartholomew's *Survey Gazetteer of the British Isles*.
- (f) H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.
- (g) *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*.
- (h) *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography*. (This gives bare facts. The full *Dictionary of National Biography* is in 22 volumes. There is also *The Twentieth Century D.N.B.*, which gives biographies of persons who died 1901-1940.)
- (i) P. M. Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*.
- (j) *The Statesman's Year-book*.

NOTE: These are not the only books that contain the information, nor is it claimed that they contain the best accounts. They are all standard works, to be found in most libraries.

2. An encyclopaedia describes the thing, a dictionary describes the word.
3. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. It was previously *The New English Dictionary*, edited by Sir. J. A. H. Murray and others, and is sometimes called *Murray's Dictionary*. There are 10 volumes and a supplement.
4. A concordance is an alphabetical list of the important words and subjects occurring in a book or in the works of an author. It enables one to trace any reference or quotation. There are concordances to the works of most great writers, and many concordances to the Bible.

# INDEX

- Abstract appendage, 65
- Abstract noun, 11-12, 23, 47, 63-8, 71, 90, 94-6
- Accent (in speech), 1-2
- Accuracy, 6, 12, 67
- Active voice, 45, 85, 89, 96
- Adjective, 9, 21-5, 32, 36-7, 40, 50, 51, 57
- Adjective equivalent, 21, 72
- Adverb, 9, 50-3, 57, 58
- Adverb equivalent, 50, 58, 72
- "Afterthoughts," 77, 96
- "All right," 34
- "Also," 77-8
- "Although," 71
- "And which," 29
- "And who," 29
- Apostrophe, 10-11
- "Appreciable," 24-5
- "As," 31-2
- Balanced sentence, 76
- "Be," 16, 43, 77, 82
- Bibliographies, 124
- Books, use of, 125-6
- Brevity, 6-7, 23, 74, 93-6, 115
- Business English, 92
- "But which," 29
- "But who," 29
- Catalogue, library, 121-2
- Choice of words, 68, 93
- Clarity, 6
- Classification, library, 121-2
- Classified catalogue, 121-2, 124
- Clause, 72, 81
- Collective nouns, 10
- Colon, 102-4
- Comma, 19, 28, 30, 99-101
- "Comparatively," 52-3
- Conclusions, 92-3
- Conjunction, 9, 50, 55-7, 75
- Criticism, 114
- Dash, 105-7
- Dictionary, 9, 54, 63, 127
- Dictionary catalogue, 121
- Double negative, 23
- Double passive, 45
- Double possessive, 11
- "Due to," 40
- "Each," 44
- "Either," 44, 55
- Elegant variation, 80, 89
- Emotional effect of words, 60-3
- Emotional prose, 5, 61, 64, 89
- Encyclopaedia, 123-4, 127
- Exclamation mark, 107
- "Fatal," 42
- Finite verb, *see* Verb
- "For example," 74
- "For instance," 74
- "Former," 79-80
- Fused participle, 37-8
- Gerund, 36, 37-8
- Headings, 113
- Hyphen, 108-9
- Idiom, 93
- "If," 46
- Impersonal construction, 86, 88
- Indirect question, 105
- Infinite verb, 35-40
- Infinitive, 35
- Intonation, 1-2, 35
- Introductions, 92, 113
- "Latter," 79-80
- Library, 121-5
- Library Association, 123, 124
- Library Catalogue, *see* Catalogue

Meaning (of words), 60-5  
 Mood, *see* Subjunctive  
 "Muddled Thinker's Best Friends," 66, 69, 90  
  
 National Book League, 124  
 National Central Library, 123  
 Negatives, 23, 78-9  
 "Neither," 44, 55  
 "None," 44  
 "Nor," 44, 55  
 Note-taking, 125-6  
 Noun, 9-13, 25, 35, 36, 47  
 Noun equivalent, 10, 27, 72  
  
 Object, 43, 48  
 "Or," 44, 55  
 "Owing to," 40  
  
 Pace (of speech), 1, 2  
 Padding, 89-93  
 Paragraph, 115-16  
 Parenthesis, 19, 86-7, 90, 105-6  
 "Parrot cries," 23-4, 25, 90, 115  
 Participles, *see* Past participle,  
     present participle, fused participle  
 Parts of speech, 9  
 Passive voice, 45, 85-6  
 Past participle, 36-7, 38, 82  
 Periodic sentence, 75-6  
 Periodicals, 123  
 Phrase, 72, 81  
 Pitch (of voice), 1  
 Planning, 112-14  
 Plural, 117  
 Possessive, 10-11  
 Précis, 116  
 Preposition, 9, 50, 53-5, 57, 59  
 Present participle, 35, 36-9, 82  
 Pronoun, 9, 14-19, 22, *see also*  
     Relative pronoun  
 Public Library, *see* Library  
 Punctuation, 1, 40, 99-109  
  
 Question, indirect, *see* Indirect question

Question mark, 105  
 Quotation marks, 107-8  
  
 "Rather," 91  
 Reference books, 122-5, 126  
 Reference library, *see* Library  
 "Referring," 39-40  
 Relative pronoun, 27-32, 33-4  
 "Relatively," 52-3  
 "Respective," 80-1  
 Revision, 114-15  
  
 "See" and "See also" references,  
     122  
 Self-criticism, 114-15  
 Semi-colon, 101-2  
 Sentence, 73-9, 85-9  
 Skimming, 125  
 "Somewhat," 91  
 Speech, 1-2, 14, 35  
 Speech, parts, of, *see* Parts of speech  
 Split infinitive, 35-6  
 Style, 93  
 Subject, 15-16  
 Subject catalogue, 121-2  
 Subjunctive mood, 45-6  
 "Such as," 32  
  
 "That," 27-9  
 "Though," 71  
 Transitive verb, 43-4, 85, 89  
  
 Verb, 9, 15, 43-8, 50, 72-3, 85  
 Voice, *see* Active, Passive voice  
 Volume (of speech), 1-2  
  
 "Were," 46  
 "Whether," 56  
 "Which," 27-31  
 "While," 56-7, 59  
 "Whilst," 59  
 "Who," 18-19, 29  
 "Wish," 46  
 Words, choice of, 68, 93  
 Words, effects of, 60-3



*Printed in Great Britain by*  
**UNWIN BROTHERS LIMITED**  
WOKING AND LONDON

